JULY
35c

# THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

*Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS*

Sing a Song of Six Pence
*by JOHN BUCHAN*

Crooked Play
*by ARTHUR SOMERS ROCHE*

The King's Brahm
*by EDGAR WALLACE*

Blood of the Innocent
*by WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT*

The Newdick Helicopter
*by LESLIE CHARTERIS*

## THE SIGN OF THE THUNDERBOLT

*A NEW NOVELET by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN*

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION

ONE OF THE MOST unflattering things that an author has to endure, after spending many years learning and practising his job, is the conviction of at least half the populace that they too could write a story if they could just find the time, or if they could only spell. There is probably no living writer who doesn't regularly have to put on a mask of strained politeness while some shmoe tells him, with unconscious insult, "If you knew some of the things that have happened in *my* life, you could *really* write a book."

The fact is that a majority of writers have led just as varied, eventful, unusual, and even improbable lives as anyone they are likely to meet, which they have astutely parlayed into a nice list of titles instead of blowing it all on one autobiography. And furthermore, to turn the tables on the dream Dostoievskys and mute Maughams, most of them if they cared to could switch to some other fellow's job and make a professional showing at it; and not a few of them have proved this by doing so.

Lawrence G. Blochman, whose SIGN OF THE THUNDERBOLT involves a president of the American Society for Buddhist Research getting murdered in Darjeeling on the eve of leaving for Tibet to observe the Devil Dance Festival, is well known for the variety of his backgrounds and the unfamiliar lore that spices his stories. This comes easier to him because there are few corners of the earth he hasn't visited—many of them on intriguing missions for the State Department, which would be glad to have him in a career berth if he wanted it.

John Buchan, whose SING A SONG OF SIXPENCE stems from a Thursday Club which has positively *no* connection with the one recently rumored to be too well liked by Prince Philip, was made Lord Tweedsmuir for his political work and appointed Governor-General of Canada, where he acquitted himself with great distinction.

Ruthven Todd, here for the first time with the brand-new COVER HER FACE, is an authority on English painting and poetry.

Edgar Wallace, whose off-trail THE KING'S BRAHM touches among other things on a collection of butterflies, at the height of his success and fabulous output, took on the extra job of analyzing the form of racehorses for a London paper. (P.S.: Like any professional handicapper, he lost money.)

I don't personally know anything about the extra-curricular talents of our other contributors this month, but I'll bet they are more surprising than those of the author of THE NEWDICK HELICOPTER, who just now is trying to build a boat.

Cleve Cartmill

*GABRIEL HEATTER reports on dramatic new invention that triumphs over hearing loss and hides deafness as never before*

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by Gabriel Heatter — Internationally Famous Commentator heard nightly over MBS network

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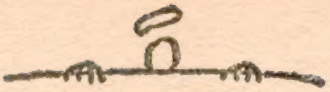

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# the sign of the thunderbolt

*by . . . Lawrence G. Blochman*

**There was blood on the young man's knuckles—blood that couldn't be explained. Was this the old man's murderer?**

THE curiously cosmopolitan hot-weather colony at Darjeeling has been inured to scandal and intrigue for a good hundred years. Yet the murder at Himalayan Cottage shocked the hill station from the old Cantonment to the Happy Valley Tea Factory. And, like so many tragedies, it all began at a peace conference.

From the sounds emanating from the study of Himalayan Cottage that lovely afternoon, nobody would have guessed that a peace conference was in progress. The little Police Commissioner, however, knew that his career depended upon the peaceful outcome. The Police Commissioner—his name was Lal Purana Siswalik, in case anyone asks—had to uphold his reputation as a diplomat, rather than as a criminologist. He was a Hindu who had come up through the ranks during the British *raj*. He had been a *paharewalla*—a uniformed constable—in Calcutta, before he began his climb to the rank of Deputy Inspector. The fact that he had adopted

*In earlier issues we have found ourselves in the South of France or on the waterfront of New York with veteran newspaperman Lawrence G. Blochman, Overseas Press Club VP, and former National President of the Mystery Writers of America. Now we are in Darjeeling, in the shadow of the Himalayas, as murder halts the departure of an American expedition to secret Tibet.*

the outward appearance of a career police officer British-Indian style, did him no good when Indian independence became a reality. There was a certain antagonism against his small but not unimportant waxed mustache whose two mahogany spikes seemed to repulse in advance any undue familiarity. Swarajists were not overly friendly to his yellow gloves, his spats, his cane, and his Homburg hat (Darjeeling was cool enough to dispense with sun helmets). But nobody could deny his record, his ability, or his integrity.

The people seated around the so-called peace table at Darjeeling that day were Frederick Ellston, president of the American Society for Buddhist Research, whose voice was the loudest and most insistent; his daughter, Anne Ellston, who worried over the antagonism her father was deliberately courting; Ray Marly, cinematographer for the Buddhist Society, who seemed worried about nothing but who was also deliberately courting—Anne Ellston; Professor Bartholomew Seeler, Ph.D., scholar of the proposed Ellston Tibet expedition, an unusually quiet man, and finally a Tibetan monk named Kong La, whose Lamasery was just a stone's throw away toward the Mall.

Frederick Ellston's booming voice was proclaiming that with seven museums, two universities, a film service, and a television network depending upon the expedition's presence in Lhasa in time for the Devil Dance festival, there was no civilized—or uncivilized—reason for their being detained in Darjeeling like this. What could be the objection?

"Your passports," said the Police Commissioner, "are not valid for any part of Communist China."

"Dammitall!" exclaimed Ellston. "I know that India in 1954 more or less agreed that Tibet is a part of China—"

"An autonomous province," interrupted Kong La.

"—so what the dickens is all the shouting about, since our expedition has received the approval of the Chinese Consulate in Calcutta? We have a letter welcoming us to Tibet, as you well know."

"Yes, yes, of course," purred the Police Commissioner. "But India also maintains friendly relations with the United States. And since your State Department has refused a visa—"

"The hell with the State Department!" exclaimed Ellston, removing an unlit cigar from his mouth. "I'm going to be quite frank with you. This is a business proposition, as far as I'm concerned. The films are going to bring us a fortune from the networks and the theatre chains. Then there will be the maga-

zines, the lectures, the books. . . . How much are you holding out for, Commissioner? And you, Mr. Kong La?"

The Tibetan monk jumped to his feet, his hands moving nervously under the folds of his long, brown-red robe, his eyes burning with dignified rage in his round, bronzed face. Before he could say anything, the academic drawl of Professor Seeler intervened diplomatically:

"Our expedition is purely in the interests of knowledge. We have pledged ourselves to a number of great institutions of learning to reach Lhasa for the Devil Dance. We have invested a tremendous amount of effort and preparation—"

"And money," interrupted Ellston.

Professor Seeler's lean fingers toyed with the Phi Beta Kappa key on his watchchain. His narrow shoulders were stooped as though bent beneath the weight of many dusty volumes. His pale, studious face was old—twenty years older than the sparkle in his dark eyes.

"Kong La," he said, savagely brushing back a lock of gray hair from his wrinkled forehead, "the world has been waiting for the book I should write after visiting Lhasa. For years I have slaved over the Pali Canons to know Hinayana Buddhism. For years I have tediously learned Sanskrit. I have mastered Tibetan in preparation for the day when I should talk with the men who control Mahayana thought from Lhasa. What right have you to bar me—to bar us—from Tibet?"

Kong La seemed to be studying his gray felt boots. His voice seemed to come from a long way off as he said: "No legal right. But I represent moral right. You know, of course, that the theocracy of the Dalai Lama has been destroyed by the Communists. The Communists in Tibet have divided the lay from the religious. They have set up a secular administration. The Dalai Lama has had to bow to superior force—at least in appearance. But the power of Mahayana Buddhism is not dead. We who still pay allegiance to the Dalai Lama have fled. We are still faithful to him, working for the Lord Buddha."

"What's all this got to do with our expedition to Tibet?" demanded Ellston, shifting his cigar to the other side of his mouth.

"You will misrepresent all that is sacred to us, and make money out of doing so," said Kong La. "Your reference to our holy festival as a Devil Dance is indication of your purpose. You will help the Communists in ridiculing our religion, in order to strengthen their atheistic hold on Tibet. You are the enemies of Lamaism. So I have ask-

ed the Police Commissioner to prevent your going to Lhasa."

"Oh, so *you're* the bad news!" sputtered Ellston. "And I thought India was independent, Mr. Commissioner!"

"My country has granted political refuge to Mr. Kong La." The Police Commissioner cleared his throat. "We have many thousands of Buddhists in India still. And of course in Darjeeling. . . ." He closed his eyes. "The time has come, I believe, for compromise. I suggest that the expedition be represented by one man only. I will give that one member a pass, with his servants, of course, by way of the trading post at Yatung. Satisfactory?"

"No!" said Kong La instantly.

Anne Ellston seized Ray Marly's hand as she saw her father go thundering across the room and shake his fist under the nose of the Lama.

"Fraud!" Ellston exclaimed. "Communist! How can you pretend to be an exile, an anti-Communist refugee, when you follow the party line? You want to keep us out because we're Americans, because we're winning the cold war, because you don't want your countrymen to learn that capitalists don't have horns. But you can't . . . keep . . . Fred . . . Ellston . . . out of Lhasa!"

As Ellston pounded at the Lama's chest to underline his words, the monk recoiled. For an instant his features were distorted into a tiger-like expression, only to resume their passive dignity.

"You will never reach Lhasa," he said, "alive."

Ellston laughed insolently. But Anne didn't laugh. Neither did the Police Commissioner. He merely looked irritated and said:

"Notwithstanding objections, I shall issue a pass for one member of this expedition. The matter must be settled somehow. Please choose your representative, Mr. Ellston."

Kong La arose and strode silently from the room.

Ellston removed the cigar from his mouth, looked at the chewed end, replaced it, and struck a match. Professor Seeler was gazing vacantly into space, the ghost of a contented smile playing about his lips.

"I'll go myself," announced Ellston, exhaling a cloud of smoke.

The smile vanished from the professor's lips. He half rose from his chair.

"I think Professor Seeler ought to go," said Anne.

"I'll do the thinking around here!" snapped Ellston. "This expedition calls for an executive. The professor is a dreamer. You couldn't do it alone, Professor."

The professor's unnaturally

black eyes flared up for a moment. Then he made a futile gesture: "Maybe you know best, Mr. Ellston, but—the languages. How will you get along?"

"English takes a man anywhere these days," replied Ellston.

Professor Seeler made no effort at rebuttal. He was crushed. Anne saw the hopelessness staring from his eyes as he sat there, the disappointment at seeing the dream of a lifetime wiped out on the eve of fulfillment. She left him to his chagrin and turned to smile on Ray Marly, the cameraman.

She had noticed with satisfaction that her father was busy talking again to the Police Commissioner. Her father didn't like young Ray Marly. But she did. She was thrilled just to be standing beside him, looking out the largest window in the cottage serving as headquarters for the American Buddhist Expedition. Below the window a little garden lay on several terraces. Beyond, the hillside dropped away with the terrifying abruptness of the Himalayas, leaving a sense of vast emptiness as a proper prelude to the sheer snow-streaked mass of Kinchinjunga rising in jagged majesty from the misty distance. She had intended to tell Ray Marly she was glad he wasn't going to Lhasa with her father, that they would have a glorious time riding over the Darjeeling trails on little hill ponies. But she said nothing.

The overpowering grandeur of the mountains silenced her. She merely hooked her fingers comfortingly into the crook of Ray's elbow and looked at Kinchinjunga. Only her father's booming voice jarred her. She heard him telling the Commissioner about the books which lined one wall of the study in neat rows. Her father was mighty proud of his library on oriental thought—although he hadn't read half of it. He liked to have the books about, and to tell people who came to Himalayan Cottage how much excess baggage he'd had to pay to bring them up from Calcutta. Although her back was turned to him, she could imagine him running his hand along the bindings, pushing a protruding volume into place. Disorder in his library worried him more than a split infinitive bothered Professor Seeler.

Suddenly conscious that she had been standing with her hand on Ray Marly's arm for several minutes without saying a word, she gave a queer little laugh and turned her dark, wistful eyes upward to the tall, blond cameraman. Marly smiled back tenderly.

"Say, Marly," Frederick Ellston's rasping voice came crashing into the friendly silence. "I'll be damned if I go cruising off

to Lhasa and leave you fooling around my daughter here in Darjeeling."

"Give your daughter credit for a little judgment, Mr. Ellston."

Ellston came closer, his box mustache bristling.

"Marly," he declared, "since this is to be a one-man expedition, I won't need a cameraman any longer. The Calcutta Mail leaves in two hours. I want you on that train."

Marly moistened his lips.

"My contract," he began.

"I'll buy your contract. I'd pay you double, triple, to keep Anne from throwing herself away on you. I'll wire the bank in Calcutta to pay you the forfeiture money and give you a ticket home. But you'll get that in Calcutta—understand?"

"I understand. You don't have to shout."

"I'll shout all I damn please. And you'll take your arm from around my daughter's waist. Go upstairs and pack your bags."

"I'll go when I get ready."

"You'll go now." Ellston punctuated his order with a slap that left three fingers glowing in scarlet on Marly's left cheek. Before the youth had recovered from his surprise, he received another blow on the right cheek. He clenched his fists and stepped forward, his eyes blazing.

Anne's arms about his neck made him pause.

"Please," Anne pleaded. There was fear, sadness, perhaps a promise in her big dark eyes.

Marly unclenched his fists.

"All right," he said in a low voice, "I'll go."

He walked quickly, rigidly, from the room.

The Commissioner, who had busied himself with his papers during what he considered a family quarrel, approached Ellston.

"I wonder," he asked, "if you expect to take that Hindu servant with you to Lhasa? The one with the red turban who opened the door when I came in?"

"Ramdas? Sure. Why not?"

"I would advise against taking Ramdas," said the police official. "He has a criminal record."

"I guess he's not a very desperate criminal," Ellston laughed. I kicked his pants twice this week, and yesterday I bought a rattan switch to discipline him with. That's the only sort of argument these natives understand. But he does understand that. I'll take him along with me, all right."

"Don't," exclaimed the Commissioner.

"I will," retorted Ellston, bristling again. "And I'm getting damned tired of you trying to run this expedition. You've—"

"I bid you, good day!" inter-

rupted the Commissioner. He bowed formally and left.

Ellston followed him.

Anne, who had been on the verge of tears since her father's scene with Ray Marly, slipped to the arm of Professor Seeler's chair. The professor sat fingering his Phi Beta Kappa key, still staring into space.

"Professor Seeler," Anne said, "my father's gruff ways are making many enemies for him. People up here don't understand him, and they might hurt him. Will you talk to him, Professor? You've been awfully good to me on this trip, and sometimes I feel closer to you than I do to dad. So I hope you don't mind my asking your help. Will you tell him to try to be more diplomatic, Professor?"

Before the savant could answer, the massive form of Frederick Ellston appeared in the doorway.

"Say, Seeler," he shouted. "If anyone wants to know where I am, tell 'em it's none of their business. I'm going down to the station to make sure that whippersnapper gets away for Calcutta."

"I'm going with you," said Anne.

The day expired in a blood-red glow on the snowy pallor of Kinchinjunga. Anne stood at her window watching lights move about in the multiple buildings of the Lamasery, huddled against the steep hillside across the way. The long, narrow prayer flags clustered crazily on the roof of the topmost building, fluttered spasmodically as they faded into the darkness settling over Darjeeling, Town of the Thunderbolt.

The Lamasery echoed with the sound of strange rites being performed by Kong La and his staff of shaven-headed monks. The clash of cymbals punctuated the blare of copper trumpets. The wail of thigh-bone bugles cut through the ringing of the *Tri-pu,* the hand bell. A gong tolled mournfully.

Anne left the window and curled up on a tiger rug before the hearth. The fire built by Ramdas, snapped and crackled. She listened to voices from the study below. She recognized the cock-sure bass of her father, and the uneven treble of Professor Seeler, rising to a crescendo of excitement. The two men had been arguing for an hour over some points of Buddhism that the professor wanted Ellston to clear up for him in Lhasa.

The girl glanced at her wrist watch. When the voices were silent, she would creep downstairs and unlatch the front door which Ramdas always locked before retiring. Ray had asked her to.

He'd left on the Calcutta Mail that afternoon, but before

he climbed aboard the dwarfed train of the narrow-gauge line, he had pressed a wad of paper into Anne's hand. The note had said all the tender trifles that such notes are expected to say. But it had also said that he was boarding the train "just to put one over on the old fool." He was getting off again at Ghoom. He would ride back to Darjeeling by hill pony after dark, and would meet her either in the study, or in the garden just under the study window.

Anne saw Ray Marly's young, virile face in the fire. The image seemed fixed, despite the fitful play of the flames. She was fascinated, almost hypnotized by the flickering blaze. She was warm, too, and the tiger rug was soft. It is barely possible that she might have dozed. . . . A log bumped off the andirons in a shower of sparks. The noise aroused her. She looked at her watch, then listened. All was silent below. She threw a sweater over her shoulders and tiptoed to the staircase.

At each step a thrill of anticipation tingled through her body. She was going to unlock the door for Ray Marly—her own Ray. She thought she had lost him, but she would soon feel his arms about her again. . . .

A scream caused her heart to skip a beat. She halted on the stairway. It was a short, surprised scream, fraught with terror, perhaps pain. It seemed to come from within the house, yet to be outside. Curiously without direction, somehow it impressed the girl as coming from the study.

Almost instantly the door to the right of the stairs opened and Professor Seeler appeared. He, too, was evidently listening for a repetition of the scream. His recalcitrant lock of silvery hair straggled over his forehead. He seemed more stooped than ever, but his black eyes shone like jet buttons. There was a book under his arm.

Without a word, Anne ran down the stairs, past Professor Seeler, to the study. She stopped on the threshold for a short, apprehensive moment, then opened the door.

Her father sat at his desk with his back towards her. He was slumped forward in his chair, his head resting on an open book. The garden window was flung back, and the night wind was stirring his iron-gray hair.

"Father!" she gasped. There was no reply. She ran forward a few steps, then stopped. There was blood on the pages of the open book. She stared for a moment, wide-eyed, her lips parted. A cry died in her throat.

She knelt down and seized a hand which hung limply over the arm of the chair.

"Father!"

Then she saw that Professor

Seeler had followed her into the study. She made a mute gesture of appeal. Her lips quivered.

"Dear Miss Anne," said the professor, raising her gently. "Let me help him."

He examined the figure slumped in the chair, felt the hands, listened for a heart beat.

"What's happened, Professor Seeler? Shall I send for a doctor?"

Slowly the professor turned from Ellston and took the girl's hands in his.

"A doctor cannot help him," he began then stopped abruptly, staring over the girl's shoulder.

Anne whirled.

In the corner of the room near the open window, stood the brown-robed Kong La, his eyes fixed on the dead man.

"What are you doing here?" demanded the professor.

"Watching. I have been watching."

"And—killing!" There was a note of triumph in the professor's voice. Anne sobbed.

The solemn Lama shook his head.

"That," he said, pointing a bony finger, "is an act of higher judgment. I came here just before the lady entered. I did not move because I did not wish to interrupt a sacred moment. Now I will go."

"You will not!" The little scholar barred the way. "Sit down." As the Lama slowly complied, Seeler turned to the girl. "Look, Miss Anne. The murderer signed his work."

Through blurred eyes, Anne saw Professor Seeler take a pencil from his pocket. With the academic manner of the lecture platform, he indicated a livid mark stamped on one side of the dead man's forehead. The mark was like a two-ended trident of bruised flesh. One end had apparently crushed Ellston's temple. Anne started in recognition of the sign.

"The *dorjé,*" said Seeler in a monotonous professorial tone. "The sign of the thunderbolt—the symbol of Lama power." His eyes narrowed a trifle as he looked at Kong La and added with slow emphasis: "Lamas often carry a scepter fashioned in the form of the *dorjé.*"

"Send Ramdas for the police—at once!"

Ramdas could not be found, but another servant brought back Commissioner Siswalik himself, the points of his mustache tightly twisted. Two uniformed police officers were with him.

The Police Commissioner took in the details of the room with a professional eye, pulled off his yellow gloves, and examined the wound on the dead man's temple.

"Jove!" he exclaimed. "The sign of the thunderbolt!"

He studied the body a mo-

ment longer, then gave directions to his subordinates to have it removed to another room. He turned to the Lama.

"You made good your threat of this afternoon, didn't you, Kong La?" he said.

"A Buddhist never kills—even his enemy," said the Lama.

The Commissioner smiled tolerantly. "Who found the body?" he asked.

"I did," Anne stifled a sob.

"I'm sorry, Miss Ellston, that I must ask questions at a moment like this. But could you tell me exactly what happened, as you saw it?"

Anne dabbed her eyes with the remnants of her handkerchief.

"I was coming downstairs," she said, "when I heard a scream. It seemed to come from this room. I ran to the door. It was closed. I opened it, and saw . . . well, he was just as you found him . . . he . . ." Anne stopped. Her lips refused to form words.

"Take your time, Miss Ellston. Who was in the room besides yourself?"

Anne pointed at Kong La.

"He was. The Tibetan priest."

"Anyone else?"

"Well, Professor Seeler came in right after I did. He heard the scream and came out of his room while I was on the stairs."

"I see. And what was your father doing earlier in the evening?"

"Talking to Professor Seeler. I could hear them from my room."

"Talking loudly, what? Quarrelling?"

"Not at all," insisted Professor Seeler. "We were arguing several points of Buddhism. The argument may have become heated, for your poor father was a very hard man to convince, as you know. He was quoting discredited authorities. I returned to my room for some of my books. While I was there I heard the scream, and . . ."

"How long were you in your room before you heard the scream?"

"Perhaps half an hour."

"You are certain, Miss Ellston, that the professor was in his own room when you heard the scream?"

"Yes. I remember him opening the door, a surprised look on his face, and a big book under his arm . . ."

"Hmm." The Commissioner put one hand in his coat pocket, as he turned toward the Lama. "Kong La, you have a great deal to explain if you expect to return to the Lamasery. Why were you here tonight?"

"I came to tell the American that we would approve only of his photographer going to Lhasa. Pictures are sometimes truthful."

"Who let you in?"

"The doors were open."

"And when you found the photographer had gone, you killed Mr. Ellston."

Kong La stood up majestically and made a sweeping gesture.

"The American was dead in that chair when I came in."

"Then who killed him, if you didn't?"

"Somebody who disappeared out that window . . . that open window . . . just as I came along."

"Who was it?"

"I don't know."

"Come now, are you accusing a phantom? At least give me a decent story to believe. Was it a man or woman, disappearing out the window?"

"I don't know. I caught only a glimpse."

"And this phantom carried a *dorjé*—like a Lama?"

Kong La's eyes moved to the chair in which the body of Frederick Ellston had been slumped, with the accusing sign of the thunderbolt on the forehead.

"Curios bearing the *dorjé* are cheap in the bazaar," said the lama impassively. "Where is my *dorjé?*"

The Commissioner fingered his mustache.

"Dutt," he said, "you and Bannerjee go outside and look about the garden. Our Tibetan friend has evidently thrown his *dorjé* out the window. Find it."

When his subordinates had gone, the Commissioner addressed Professor Seeler.

"Was this window open while you were talking to Mr. Ellston last?"

"No," said the professor. "I remember closing . . ."

A shout from the garden interrupted him. There were sounds of running, a man panting, then a pistol shot.

"Up with your hands!" came a command with a strong Indian accent. "There's no use trying to get away."

A silence of expectation fell upon the occupants of the murder room. The Lama looked at Siswalik who was peering out the window with a bored expression. Professor Seeler toyed with his Phi Beta Kappa key. Anne glanced nervously at her wrist watch.

"He was prowling among the bushes," Bannerjee announced, as he marched his prisoner into the study.

Hands high above his head, frightened surprise written on his boyish face, Ray Marly walked with a gun pressed against the small of his back. He glanced around the room, until his eyes found Anne's tear-stained face.

"Why are you in Darjeeling tonight, after boarding the Calcutta Mail this afternoon?" snapped the Police Commissioner.

Marly said nothing.

"What were you doing in the garden of Himalayan Cottage when you should have been on your way to Calcutta?" repeated the Commissioner.

Marly looked at Anne again.

"I was studying botany," he said.

"Impertinent answers won't help you, young man. You're in trouble."

"I'm sorry, Anne," said Marly, ignoring his inquisitor. "I didn't know the cops were around. When this character started shooting at me, I thought . . ." He stopped, confused. There was a strained silence. Anne sobbed. It was the Police Commissioner who spoke first.

"Mr. Ellston," he said solemnly, "has been murdered—as you know."

"I'm . . . Oh, Anne, please."

Marly's arms reached out to Anne. He stepped toward her. Bannerjee pulled him back.

"Stand there until I'm through with you," commanded the Commissioner. "You still have to explain . . ."

Dutt burst into the room to interrupt his superior.

"Here it is!" Dutt exclaimed. "I found it under the window. It's got blood on it!"

He held out a curiously fashioned short scepter of wrought silver and matrix inlaid turquoise. At one end the metal was shaped like a two-ended trident—the *dorjé,* sign of the thunderbolt.

Anne Ellston paled as she saw it.

The Police Commissioner scrutinized her face before he turned to the Lama.

"Ever see this before?" he demanded.

"No," said Kong La.

"Did you, Miss Ellston?"

The Law was pointing at Anne.

Anne did not reply. She stared.

"Did you ever see this before?" the inquisitor asked Professor Seeler.

"Why . . . yes," admitted the professor hesitantly.

"Where?"

"I was with Miss Ellston this morning when she bought it in the bazaar," said the professor.

"True, Miss Ellston?"

Anne nodded.

"It was a present for my father," she said. "A souvenir . . ."

"And what did you do with it after you bought it?"

Anne closed her eyes for a moment. She was so tired, so upset! She would give anything to be alone for a minute. Yet she had to sit there and answer questions just as though nothing had happened. She swallowed. The seconds ticked by and she had not yet replied. Ray Marly, watching her face,

couldn't quite make out the reason for her hesitancy.

"She gave it to me," he declared deliberately.

"That's not true," Anne spoke quickly. "I gave it to my father."

"Why should this man say you gave it to him, Miss Ellston?"

"For the same reason he won't explain why he was in the garden. Because he's trying to make things easy for me. Because he loves me. That's why he came back to Darjeeling tonight—and I wanted him to come. We weren't going to let my . . . my father come between us."

"It's possible, that he was even more determined than you. It's—hello, what's this?" He got up hurriedly and was by Marly's side in a few swift steps. He seized the youth's right wrist brutally and examined the back of his hand. There were dark stains there.

Siswalik's eyes gleamed.

"Blood!" he exclaimed. "Why is there blood on your knuckles? And on your cuffs?"

Marly frowned.

"I guess it's my own blood," he said. "I must have skinned my knuckles a little while ago."

"We'll see. A handkerchief, Bannerjee. Wipe it off. Come on, rub! You won't hurt him. There. Your knuckles are certainly not bleeding! The skin isn't even broken."

Marly's frown deepened.

"My ring must have cut his lip or something," he said.

"Who?"

"I don't know who he was. A fellow ran into me in the garden tonight. I thought he was after me and hit him. That must be his blood."

"Whose blood?"

"I don't know. It was dark. He didn't stop to argue."

The Police Commissioner resumed his seat. With the first and second fingers of one hand he verified the ends of his mustache.

"Now, let me tell a story," he began. "Young Marly here is thwarted by Mr. Ellston, slapped under humiliating circumstances, dismissed only a few hours ago. He leaves. Let us suppose he has come back to meet you, Miss Ellston, according to your pre-arranged plan. He is in the garden. Looking through the study window he sees your father alone. It occurs to the young man that if he runs away with you, your father might cut you off without a rupee, while if your father should die, you would inherit quite a fortune. The young man decides he would rather marry an heiress than a pauper. He climbs through the window, picks up the *dorjé,* strikes . . ."

"That's enough!" Marly flushed with anger. "Anne knows that I don't care whether she's rich or poor."

"Very well," resumed the Police Commissioner. "Suppose, then, he cared nothing for your financial status. Suppose, on the other hand, he remembers the slaps which he received from your father. Suppose he comes into the house—the Lama says the door was open—and finds Mr. Ellston is still up. The quarrel of this afternoon is resumed. Your father is furious that he has dared come back. Young Marly loses his temper, picks up . . ."

"No!" shouted the girl. "He couldn't! Ray didn't kill him."

"Your father didn't kill himself, Miss Ellston," said the Police Commissioner. "Either Marly did, or Kong La did. Either of them might consider himself justified in doing so. Evidence points to Marly."

"You didn't do it, Ray. He's mad. I know you didn't."

"Of course, I didn't, Anne, but don't worry, I'll . . ."

"Please, Miss Ellston. I'm conducting this investigation."

The Commissioner went back over his two theories. He would question the Lama at length, trying to shake him in some point of his story. Suddenly he would switch and fire a question to catch Marly off his guard. Both clung to their first statements.

As the law continued to worry the two suspects, the sky began to pale. In the void that lay beyond the window, a ghostly sea of mist was writhing into strange waves that moved with the slowness of centuries.

Anne saw the night fade and human spirits droop. The Police Commissioner alone seemed indefatigable, but even his voice was becoming a little hoarse.

"Perhaps a little hot coffee might help us all," Anne suggested wearily.

Professor Seeler volunteered to rouse the Khansama. On his way back he stopped before the paling window. The phantom breakers on the far shore of the sea of mist rolled back from the stark peak of frozen Kinchinjunga, guarding the frontiers of Tibet, land of the thunderbolt. There was a ghost of a smile on his face as he turned to resume his seat.

A moment later, Ramdas appeared with cups on a tray.

As he came through the door, Ray Marly sprang to his feet.

"That's him!" he cried. "There's the man I hit. Look how his nose is swollen. It must have spurted when I hit him. That's where the blood came from."

"Come here, Ramdas," ordered the Commissioner.

Ramdas dropped the trayful of cups but did not move. Siswalik threatened in Hindustani. Ramdas uttered not a word. The Commissioner produced a pair of handcuffs.

Suddenly Ramdas began to

tremble. He pulled off his red turban and took out a wallet. Gold letters stamped on the leather read FREDERICK ELLSTON.

The Commissioner snapped a command.

Still trembling, the servant whined his story. He had come up to lock the front door for the night, he said, when he had noticed a light in the study. He looked in, and saw Ellston Sahib asleep in his chair. The thought occurred to him that he might take the Sahib's wallet without awakening him (the Thanadar Sahib knew how clever he was at such things). He took the wallet, and the Sahib did not wake up. Then someone came to the door, and Ramdas, panic stricken, ran to the window, opened it, and jumped into the garden. A moment later he bumped into Marly Sahib who hit him. He cried out in surprise and pain. Then, frightened, he hid in the garden until he could sneak back to the servant's quarters unobserved.

Ellston Sahib dead? No, he hadn't known the Sahib was dead.

He rolled his eyes. No, of course he didn't kill him. Wouldn't. Yes, the Sahib kicked him often, but he wouldn't have killed him. He had thought he was asleep . . .

"Congratulations, Mr. Commissioner," said Professor Seeler, "our quest seems ended. There can be no question that the Hindu lad is the murderer."

"On the contrary! I am convinced that Ramdas is not the person I am about to arrest."

"But the evidence of the wallet? His own admissions?"

"Knowing Ramdas as I do," the Law went on, "I am quite sure that he would not have returned to this house if he had killed Mr. Ellston. He has been arrested before as a pickpocket. On the other hand, his story by no means exonerates either Marly or Kong La. Then there is another point I should like to clear up, Professor, if you can give me the time."

"By all means . . ."

"The cry you and Miss Ellston heard was apparently that of Ramdas. Mr. Ellston had been killed some time previous. Now just how long was it, Professor, between the time you left Mr. Ellston and the time you heard the cry?"

"I should say about twenty or twenty-five minutes. I couldn't say exactly, as I was looking through my books for new references in our little dispute."

"What was the nature of this dispute? Anything to do with the expedition to Lhasa?"

"Not at all. Merely abstract points of doctrine. Mr. Ellston was trying to convince me by quoting from Hobart's *Tenets of*

*Lamaism* which of course is hopelessly out of date."

The Police Commissioner picked up the blood-stained book from the desk in front of him.

"This bears out your story, Professor," he said. "This is a copy of Hobart's *Tenets of Lamaism.* And now, Dutt, give me the handcuffs. It's time for us to go along home—and take the murderer with us."

He dangled the steel bracelets for a moment, looking about the room at the various expressions of anxiety. Then he stepped quickly forward and snapped the cuffs about the wrists of Ray Marly!

"No!" cried Anne. "You can't do that. You can't take Ray. He didn't do it."

"Sorry, Miss Ellston. I'm convinced."

"No! You can't. He's innocent!"

She fought to keep back the tears. Her head swam. She heard the Commissioner, as from a great distance, say something about "two minutes to talk to the prisoner." There was a mist, a red mist dancing before her eyes. She made a movement with her hand as though to brush it away. She must not give in to her nerves now. Ray needed her. She must pull herself together. She shook her head and made her eyes focus on something definite, something familiar, friendly and inanimate. She sent her glance along the book shelves, to steady herself, to regain her self control for a few seconds. Suddenly she stared.

In front of her was a whole section of the bookcase in violent disorder. Books were protruding halfway off the shelf, leaning against each other, and generally showing signs that a volume or two had been jerked hurriedly from their midst. Her father would never have left the bookcase in that state. With his mania for order and efficiency, he always restored the alignment whenever a book was removed. Someone else had done this. Someone else who . . .

"Mr. Police Commissioner, may I ask a few questions?"

"Certainly, Miss Ellston, if you don't keep us too long."

Conscious of the curious eyes now turned upon her, perfectly calm, with a stern determination burning in her dark eyes, Anne walked deliberately to the desk and picked up the stained copy of Hobart's *Tenets of Lamaism.*

"Who took this book down, Professor Seeler?" she asked.

"Your father, Miss Anne. He was reading to me about . . ."

"Exactly what was he reading?"

The professor arose and began talking in a Chatauqua tone of voice. He was in his element.

"We were talking about

Lamas being considered mediators between the sinner and a deified Buddha. Hobart claims that this idea was imported from China, and your father agreed with him."

"In what chapter is that found?"

"In the chapter on the Dalai Lama. Near the beginning of the book."

Anne turned the pages.

"The chapter headed 'The Dalai Lama'—is that it?"

"That's it."

"Do you remember the quotations?"

"We were arguing about a line that runs something like this: 'The idea of a priesthood that was to seek favors from a Buddha raised to the heights of a god, came to Tibet from Yunnan.' You'll find that on the second or third page of the chapter."

"My father read this to you tonight?" There was an ominous chill to the words.

"We read it together. I was looking over his shoulder."

Anne pressed her lips together until they were white. Contempt flared in the eyes she turned upon the professor.

"Professor Seeler, my father didn't take this book down tonight. My father wouldn't have left that disorder in the bookcase. You took it down yourself." Anne's voice rose. "You took it down, but not to argue Buddhism. You were fighting about the trip to Lhasa. And my father never read about the Dalai Lama in this book, Professor, because my father was dead when you took it down from the shelf! Look, Mr. Police Commissioner!" She held out the blood-stained volume. "Look! My father never read this book. The first eight pages in the chapter on the Dalai Lama are uncut. The professor lied! It was he who killed my father. He killed him to go to Lhasa in his place. See! The pages are uncut!"

Anne laughed grimly, a little hysterically, as she tossed the book across the desk.

Professor Seeler stared for ten seconds as though he were looking with unfocused eyes into eternity. He aged twenty years in those few seconds. His shoulders drooped, the light died in his youthful black eyes. He sat down weakly and clasped his head in his hands.

When he raised his face, it was a mask of savage despair. There was an unfamiliar curl to the thin lips as he said:

"Yes, I killed him. I killed him because he killed the purpose of my life. This expedition was my idea. My whole career has been preparation for it. When Ellston's money outweighed my learning, the injustice of the thing, the disappointment, drove me crazy. I decided

to kill Ellston and go to Lhasa in his stead. I didn't think I could do it, though, until he brandished that silver scepter, in a moment of anger. I snatched it from him. I crushed his skull with the sign of the thunderbolt."

The professor was on his feet again. His treble voice cracked as he went on. "Yes, I took down the book to help my alibi. I took a volume at random. I knew I could quote passages verbatim from any of them. But this one—I didn't notice the pages were uncut . . ."

He sank into a chair, whispering to himself.

Anne closed her eyes, swaying as though she were about to fall. Ray Marly slipped his manacled wrists over her head to support her. He held her close. She was crying quietly on his breast when she heard the liberating keys click in the steel bracelets behind her back.

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## HOW IS YOUR CRIME I.Q.?

WHICH OF THE following names do you associate with the following crimes?

| | |
|---|---|
| Hawley Harvey Crippen | Florence Maybrink |
| George Joseph Smith | Catherine de Medeci |
| Marguerite Gertrude Zelle | Madeleine Smith |
| Belle Gunness | William Palmer |
| George Edaljii | Sidney Fox |

1. Arsenic poisoning of Emile l'Angelier.
2. Murdered his wife and ran away with his secretary.
3. Strychnine poisoning of wife and brother.
4. Strangled mother.
5. Espionage, under the name of Mata Hari.
6. Arsenic poisoning of husband.
7. Solicitor sentenced to seven years penal servitude for cattle maiming. Freed, after three years, through the efforts of Conan Doyle.
8. Used to drown his wives in the bathtub.
9. Often called the "female Bluebeard." Murdered dozens of husbands obtained through lonely heart agencies.
10. Used to dispose of former aides who were no longer useful by poisoning them.

*Please turn to page 122 for the answers.*

# the newdick helicopter

*by . . . Leslie Charteris*

**The Saint found the problem quite promising. Here was this garlic-blossom and his racket—with unknown possibilities. . . .**

"I'M AFRAID," said Patricia Holm soberly, "you'll be getting into trouble again soon."

Simon Templar grinned, and opened another bottle of Peter Dawson. He poured from it with a steady hand, unshaken by the future predicted for him.

"You may be right, darling," he admitted. "Trouble is one of the things that sort of happen to me, like other people have colds."

"I've often heard you complaining about it," said the girl sceptically.

The Saint shook his head.

"You wrong me," he said. "Posterity will know me as a maligned, misunderstood, ill-used victim of a cruel fate. I have tried to be good. Instinctive righteousness glows from me like an inward light. But nobody gives it a chance. What do you suggest?"

"You might go into business."

"I know. Something safe and respectable, like manufacturing woollen underwear for elderly ladies with lorgnettes. We might

*Before any amateur experts write in and tell us that helicopters today* do *go straight up and down, we hasten to remind you that this prophetic story was written years ago, when they didn't; and these modern improvements may be traced to the Saint's interest in the matter of the talented Mr. Oscar Newdick!*



From: THE SAINT INTERVENES
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throw in a pair of lorgnettes with every suit. You could knit them, and I'd do the fitting—of the lorgnettes, of course."

Simon raised his glass and drank deeply. "It's an attractive idea, old darling, but all these schemes involve laying out a lot of capital on which you have to wait such a hell of a long time for a return. Besides, there can't be much of a profit in it. On a rough estimate, the amount of wool required to circumnavigate a fifty-four-inch bust—"

Monty Hayward, who was also present, took out a tobacco-pouch and began to fill his pipe.

"I had some capital once," he said reminiscently, "but it didn't do me much good."

"How much can you lend me?" asked the Saint hopefully.

Monty brushed stray ends of tobacco from his lap and tested the draught through his handiwork cautiously.

"I haven't got it any more, but I don't think I'd lend it to you if I had," he said kindly. "Anyway, the point doesn't arise, because a fellow called Oscar Newdick has got it. Didn't I ever tell you about it?"

The Saint moved his head negatively, and settled deeper into his chair.

"It doesn't sound like you, Monty. D'you mean to say you were hornswoggled?"

Monty nodded. "I suppose you might call it that. It happened about six years ago, when I was a bit younger and not quite so wise. It wasn't a bad swindle on the whole, though." He struck a match and puffed meditatively. "This fellow Newdick was a bloke I met on the train coming down from the office. He used to get into the same compartment with me three or four times a week, and naturally we took to passing the time of day—you know the way one does. He was an aeronautical engineer and a bit of an inventor, apparently.

"He was experimenting with autogiros, and he had a little one-horse factory near Walton where he was building them. He used to talk a lot of technical stuff about them to me, and I talked technical stuff about make-up and dummies to him—I don't suppose either of us understood half of what the other was talking about, so we got on famously."

With his pipe drawing satisfactorily, Monty possessed himself of the beer-opener and executed a neat flanking movement towards the source of supply.

"Well, one day this fellow Newdick asked me if I'd like to drop over and have a look at his autogiros, so the following Saturday afternoon I hadn't anything particular to do and I took a run out to his aerodrome to see how he was getting along.

All he had there was a couple of corrugated-iron sheds and a small field which he used to take off from and land at, but he really had got a helicopter effect which he said he'd made himself. He told me all about it and how it worked, which was all double-Dutch to me; and then he asked me if I'd like to go up in it. So I said 'Thank you very much, I should simply hate to go up in it.'

"You know what these things look like—an ordinary airplane with the wings taken off and just a sort of large fan business to hold you up in the air—I never have thought they looked particularly safe even when they're properly made, and I certainly didn't feel like risking my neck in this home-made version that he'd rigged up out of old bits of wood and angle iron. However, he was so insistent about it and seemed so upset when I refused that eventually I thought I'd better gratify the old boy and just keep on praying that the damn thing wouldn't fall to pieces before we got down again."

The Saint sighed. "So that's what happened to your face," he remarked, in a tone of profound relief. "If you only knew how that had been bothering me—"

"My mother did that," said Monty proudly. "No—we didn't crash. In fact, I had a really interesting flight. Either it must have been a very good machine, or he was a very good flier, because he made it do almost everything except answer questions. I don't know if you've ever been up in one of these autogiros—I've never been up in any other make, but this one was certainly everything that he claimed for it.

"It went up exactly like going up a lift, and came down the same way. I never have known anything about the mechanics of these things, but after having had a ride in this bus of his, I couldn't help feeling that the Air Age had arrived—I mean, anyone with a reasonable sized lawn could have kept one of 'em and gone tootling off for week ends in it."

"And therefore," said the Saint reproachfully, "when he asked you if you'd like to invest some money in a company he was forming to turn out these machines and sell them at about twenty pounds a time, you hauled out your check-book and asked him how much he wanted."

Monty chuckled good-humoredly. "That's about it. The details don't really matter, but the fact is that about three weeks later I'd bought about five thousand quids' worth of shares."

"What was the catch?" Simon asked.

Monty shrugged. "Well, the catch was simply that this heli-

copter wasn't his invention at all. He had really built it himself, apparently, but it was copied line for line from one of the existing makes. There wasn't a thing in it that he invented. Therefore the design wasn't his, and he hadn't any right at all to manufacture it. So the company couldn't function.

"Of course, he didn't put it exactly like that. He told me that he'd 'discovered' that his designs 'overlapped' the existing patents—he swore that it was absolutely a coincidence, and nearly wept all over my office because his heart was broken because he'd found out that all his research work had already been done before.

"I told him I didn't believe a word of it, but that wasn't any help towards getting my money back. I hadn't any evidence against him that I could have brought into a court of law. Of course he'd told me that his design was patented and protected in every way, but he hadn't put any of that in writing, and when he came and told me the whole thing was smashed he denied it. He said he'd told me he was getting the design patented. I did see a lawyer about it afterwards, but he told me I hadn't a chance of proving a deliberate fraud. Newdick would probably have been ticked off in court for taking money without reasonable precautions, but that wouldn't have brought any of it back."

"It was a private company, I suppose," said the Saint.

Monty nodded. "If it had been a public one, with shares on the open market, it would have been a different matter," he said.

"What happened to the money?"

"Newdick had spent it—or he said he had. He told me he'd paid off all the old debts that had run up while he was experimenting, and spent the rest on some manufacturing plant and machinery for the company. He did give me about six or seven hundred back, and told me he'd work like hell to produce another invention that would really be original so he could pay me back the rest, but that was the last I heard of him. He's probably caught several other mugs with the same game since then." Monty grinned philosophically, looked at the clock, and got up. "Well, I must be getting along. I'll look in and see you on Saturday—if you haven't been arrested and shoved in clink before then."

He departed after another bottle of beer had been lowered; and when he had gone Patricia Holm viewed the Saint doubtfully. She had not missed the quiet attention with which he had followed Monty Hayward's

narrative; and she had known Simon Templar a long time.

The Saint had a fresh cigarette slanting from the corner of his mouth, his hands were in his pockets, and he was smiling at her with a seraphic innocence which was belied by every facet of the twinkling tang of mockery in his blue eyes.

"You know what I told you," she said.

He laughed. "About getting into trouble? My darling, when will you stop thinking these wicked thoughts? I'm taking your advice to heart. Maybe there is something to be said for going into business. I think I should look rather fetching in a silk hat and a pair of white spats with pearl buttons; and you've no idea how I could liven up a directors' meeting if I set my mind to it."

Patricia was not convinced.

She was even less convinced when the Saint went out the next morning. From his extensive wardrobe he had selected one of his most elegant suits, a creation in light-hued saxony of the softest and most expensive weave—a garment which could by no possible chance have been worn by a man who had to devote his day to honest toil. His tie was dashing, his silk socks would have made a Communist's righteous indignation swell to bursting point, and over his right eye he had tilted a brand new Panama which would have made one wonder whether the strange shapeless headgear of the same breed worn by old gents whilst pottering around their gardens could conceivably be any relation whatsoever of such a superbly stylish lid.

Moreover he had taken out the car which was the pride of his stable—the new cream and red Hirondel which was in itself the hallmark of a man who could afford to pay five thousand pounds for a car and thereafter watch a gallon of petrol blown into smoke every three or four miles.

"Where's the funeral?" she asked; and the Saint smiled blandly.

"I'm a young sportsman with far more money than sense, and I'm sure Comrade Newdick will be pleased to see me," he said; and he kissed her.

Mr. Oscar Newdick was pleased to see him—Simon Templar would have been vastly surprised if he hadn't been. That aura of idle affluence which the Saint could put on as easily as he put on a coat was one of his most priceless accessories, and it was never worn for any honest purpose.

But this Mr. Oscar Newdick did not know. To him, the arrival of such a person was like an answer to prayer. Monty Hayward's guess at Mr. Newdick's activities since collecting

five thousand pounds from him was fairly accurate, but only fairly. Mr. Newdick had not caught several other mugs, but only three; and one of them had only been induced to invest a paltry three hundred pounds.

The helicopter racket had been failing in its dividends, and the past year had not shown a single pennyworth of profit. Mr. Newdick did not believe in accumulating pennies: when he made a touch, it had to be a big one, and he was prepared to wait for it—the paltry three hundred pound investor had been an error of judgment, a young man who had grossly misled him with fabulous accounts of wealthy uncles, which when the time came to make the touch had been discovered to be the purest fiction—but recently the periods of waiting had exceeded all reasonable limits.

Mr. Newdick had traveled literally thousands of miles on the more prosperous suburban lines in search of victims—the fellow-passenger technique really was his own invention, and he practiced it to perfection—but many moons had passed since he brought a prospective investor home from his many voyages.

When Simon Templar arrived, in fact, Mr. Newdick was gazing mournfully over the litter of spars and fabric and machinery in one of his corrugated-iron sheds, endeavoring to estimate its value in the junk market. The time had come, he was beginning to feel, when that particular stock-in-trade had paid the last percentage that could be squeezed out of it: it had rewarded him handsomely for his initial investment, but now it was obsolete.

The best solution appeared to be to turn it in and concentrate his varied talents on some other subject. A fat insurance policy, of course, followed by a well-organized fire, would have been more profitable, but a recent sensational arson trial and the consequent publicity given to such schemes made him wary of taking that way out. And he was engrossed in these uninspiring meditations when the bell in his "office" rang and manna fell from heaven.

Mr. Oscar Newdick, it must be acknowledged, did not instantly recognize it as manna. At first he thought it could only be the rent collector, or another summons for his unpaid electric light bill. He tiptoed to a grimy window which looked out on the road, with intent to escape rapidly across the adjacent fields if his surmise proved correct; and it was thus that he saw the imposing automobile which stood outside.

Mr. Newdick, a man of the world, was jerry to the fact that rent collectors and servers of summonses rarely arrive to their

grim work in five-thousand-pound Hirondels; and it was with an easy conscience, if not yet admixed with undue optimism, that he went to open the door.

"Hullo, old bean," said the Saint.

"Er—hullo," said Mr. Newdick.

"I blew in to see if you could tell me anything about your jolly old company," said the Saint.

"Er—yes," said Mr. Newdick. "Er—why don't you come inside?"

His hesitation was not due to any bashfulness or even to offended dignity. Mr. Newdick did not mind being called an old bean. He had no instinctive desire to snub wealthy-looking young men with five-thousand-pound Hirondels who added jollity to his old company. The fact was that he was just beginning to recognize the manna for what it was, and his soul was suffering the same emotions as those which had afflicted the Israelites in their time when they contemplated the miracle.

The Saint came in. Mr. Newdick's "office" was a small roughly-fashioned cubicle about the size of a telephone booth, containing a small table littered with papers and overlaid with a thin film of dust—it scarcely seemed in keeping with the neatly engraved brass plate on the door which proclaimed it to be the registered offices of the Newdick Helicopter Company, Limited, but his visitor did not seem distressed by it.

"What did you want to know?" asked Mr. Newdick.

Simon observed him to be a middle-aged man of only vaguely military appearance, with sharp eyes that looked at him unwaveringly. That characteristic alone might have deceived most men; but Simon Templar had moved in disreputable circles long enough to know that the ability to look another man squarely in the eye is one of the most fallacious indices of honesty.

"Well," said the Saint amiably, tendering a platinum cigarette-case, "the fact is that I'm interested in helicopters. I happen to have noticed your little place several times recently when I've been passing, and I got the idea that it was quite a small show, and I wondered if there might by any chance be room for another partner in it."

"You mean," repeated Mr. Newdick, checking back on the incredible evidence of his ears, "that you wanted to take an interest in the firm?"

Simon nodded. "That was the jolly old idea," he said. "In fact, if the other partners felt like selling out, I might take over the whole blinkin' show. I've got a good deal of time on my

hands, and I like pottering about with airplanes and what not. A chap's got to do something to keep out of mischief, what? Besides, it doesn't look as if you were doing a lot of business here, and I might be able to wake the jolly old place up a bit. Sort of aerial roadhouse, if you know what I mean. Dinners — drinks — dancing — pretty girls . . . What?"

"I didn't say anything," said Mr. Newdick.

"All right. What about it, old bean?"

Mr. Newdick scratched his chin. The notion of manna had passed into his cosmogony. It fell from heaven. It was real. Miracles happened. The world was a brighter, rosier place.

"One of your remarks, of course," he said, "is somewhat uninformed. As a matter of fact, we are doing quite a lot of business. We have orders, negotiations, tenders, contracts . . ." The eloquent movement of one hand, temporarily released from massaging his chin, indicated a whole field of industry of which the uninitiated were in ignorance. "However," he said, "if your proposition were attractive enough, it would be worth hearing."

Simon nodded. "Well, old bean, who do I put it to?"

"You may put it to me, if you like," said Mr. Newdick. "I am Oscar Newdick."

"I see. But what about the other partners, Oscar, old sprout?"

Mr. Newdick waved his hand. "They are largely figureheads," he explained. "A few friends, with very small interests—just enough to meet the technical requirements of a limited company. The concern really belongs to me."

Simon beamed. "Splendid!" he said. "Jolly good! Well, well, well, dear old Newdick, what d'you think it's worth?"

"There is a nominal share value of twenty-five thousand pounds," said Mr. Newdick seriously. "But, of course, they are worth far more than that. Far more. . . . I very much doubt," he said, "whether fifty thousand would be an adequate price. My patents alone are worth more than fifty thousand pounds. Sixty thousand pounds would scarcely tempt me. Seventy thousand would be a poor price. Eighty thousand—"

"Is quite a lot of money," said the Saint, interrupting Mr. Newdick's private auction.

Mr. Newdick nodded. "But you haven't seen the place yet —or the machine we turn out. You ought to have a look around, even if we can't do business."

Mr. Newdick suffered a twinge of horror at the thought even while he uttered it.

He led the Saint out of his

"office" to the junk shed. No one who had witnessed his sad survey of that collection of lumber a few minutes before would have believed that it was the same man who now gazed on it with such enthusiasm and affection.

"This," said Mr. Newdick, "is our workshop. Here you can see the parts of our machine in course of construction and assembly. Those lengths of wood are our special longerons. Over there are stays and braces. . . ."

"By Jove!" said the Saint in awe. "I'd no idea helicopters went in for all those things. They must be quite dressed up when you've finished with them, what? By the way, talking of longerons, a girl friend of mine wears the neatest kind of panties . . ."

Mr. Newdick listened patiently.

Presently they passed on to the other shed. Mr. Newdick opened the doors as reverently as if he had been unveiling a memorial.

"And this," he said, "is the Newdick helicopter."

Simon glanced over it vacuously, and looked about him.

"Where are all your workmen today?" he asked.

"They are on holiday," said Mr. Newdick, making a mental note to engage some picturesque mechanics the next day. "An old custom of the firm. I always give them a full day's holiday on the anniversary of my dear mother's death." He wiped away a tear and changed the subject. "How would you like to take a flight?"

"Jolly good idea," agreed the Saint.

The helicopter was wheeled out, and while it was warming up, Simon revealed that he also was a flier and possessed a license for helicopters. Mr. Newdick complimented him gravely. They made a ten-minute flight, and when they had landed again the Saint remained in his seat.

"D'you mind if I try her out myself?" he said. "I won't ask you to take the flight with me."

The machine was not fitted with dual control, but it was well insured. Mr. Newdick only hesitated a moment. He was very anxious to please.

"Certainly," he said. "Give her a thorough test yourself, and you'll see that she's a good bus."

Simon took the ship off and climbed towards the north. When Mr. Newdick's tiny airdrome was out of sight he put the helicopter through every test he could think of, and the results amazed him even while they only confirmed the remarkable impression he had gained while Mr. Newdick was flying it.

When he saw the London Air Park below him he shut off the

engine and came down in a perfect vertical descent which set him down outside the Cierva hangers. Simon climbed out and buttonholed one of the company's test pilots.

"Would you like to come on a short hop with me?" he asked. "I want to show you something."

As they walked back towards the Newdick helicopter the pilot studied it with a puzzled frown.

"Is that one of our machines?" he asked.

"More or less," Simon told him.

"It looks as if it had been put together wrong," said the pilot worriedly. "Have you been having trouble with it?"

The Saint shook his head.

"I think you'll find," he answered, "that it's been put together right."

He demonstrated what he meant, and when they returned the test pilot took the machine up again himself and tried it a second time. Other test pilots tried it. Engineers scratched their heads over it and tried it. Telephone calls were made to London. A whole two hours passed before Simon Templar dropped the machine beside Mr. Newdick's sheds and relieved the inventor of the agonies of anxiety which had been racking him.

"I was afraid you'd killed yourself," said Mr. Newdick with emotion; and indeed the thought that his miraculous benefactor might have passed away before being separated from his money had brought Mr. Newdick out in several cold sweats.

The Saint grinned. "I just buzzed over to Reading to look up a friend," he said untruthfully. "I like your helicopter. Let us go inside and talk business."

When he returned to Patricia, much later that day, he was jubilant but mysterious. He spent most of the next day with Mr. Newdick, and half of the Saturday which came after, but he refused to tell her what he was doing. It was not until that evening, when he was pouring beer once more for Monty Hayward, that he mentioned Mr. Newdick again; and then his announcement took her breath away.

"I've bought that helicopter company," he said casually.

"You've *what?*" spluttered Monty.

"I've bought that helicopter company and everything it owns," said the Saint, "for forty thousand pounds."

They gaped at him for a while in silence, while he calmly continued with the essential task of opening bottles.

"The man's mad," said Patricia finally. "I always thought so."

"When did you do this?" asked Monty.

"We fixed up the last details of the deal today," said the Saint. "Oscar is due here at any minute to sign the papers."

Monty swallowed beer feverishly.

"I suppose you wouldn't care to buy my shares as well?" he suggested.

"Sure, I'll buy them," said the Saint affably. "Name your price. Oscar's contribution gives me a controlling interest, but I can always handle a bit more. As ordered by Patricia, I'm going into business. The machine is to be rechristened the Templar helicopter. I shall go down to history as the man who put England in the air. Bevies of English beauty, wearing their Templar longerons—stays, braces, and everything complete—"

The ringing of his door-bell interrupted the word-picture and took him from the room before any of the questions that were howling through their bewildered minds could be asked.

Mr. Newdick was on the mat, beaming like a delighted fox. Simon took his hat and umbrella, took Mr. Newdick by the arm, and led him through into the living room.

"Boys and girls," he said cheerfully, "this is our fairy godmother, Mr. Oscar Newdick. This is Miss Holm, Oscar, old toadstool; and I think you know Mr. Hayward—"

The inventor's arm had stiffened under his hand, and his smile had vanished. His face was turning pale and nasty.

"What's the game?" he demanded hoarsely.

"No game at all, dear old garlic-blossom," said the Saint innocently. "Just a coincidence. Mr. Hayward is going to sell me his shares too. Now all the papers are here, and if you'll just sign on the dotted line—"

"I refuse!" babbled Newdick wildly. "It's a trap!"

Simon stepped back and regarded him blandly.

"A trap, Oscar? What on earth are you talking about? You've got a jolly good helicopter, and you've nothing to be ashamed of. Come, now, be brave. Harden the Newdick heart. There may be a wrench at parting with your brain-child, but you can cry afterwards. Just a signature or two on the dotted line and it's all over. And there's a check for forty thousand pounds waiting for you. . . ."

He thrust a fountain pen into the inventor's hand; and, half-hypnotized, Mr. Oscar Newdick signed. The Saint blotted the signatures carefully and put the agreements away in a drawer, which he locked. Then he handed Mr. Newdick a check. The inventor grasped it weakly and stared at the writing and figures

on it as if he expected them to fade away under his eyes. He had the quite natural conviction that his brain had given way.

"Th-thank you very much," he said shakily, and was conscious of little more than an overpowering desire to remove himself from those parts—to camp out on the doorstep of a bank and wait there with his head in his hands until morning, when he could pass the check over the counter and see crisp currency clicking back to him in return to prove that his sanity was not entirely gone. "Well, I must be going," he gulped out; but the Saint stopped him.

"Not a bit of it, Oscar," he murmured. "You don't intrude. In fact, you ought to be the guest of honor. Your class as an inventor really is A-1. When I showed the Cierva people what you'd done, they nearly collapsed."

Mr. Newdick blinked at him in a painful daze.

"What do you mean?" he stammered.

"Why, the way you managed to build an autogiro that would go straight up and down. None of the ordinary ones will, of course—the torque of the vanes would make it spin around like a top if it didn't have a certain amount of forward movement to hold it straight. I can only think that when you got hold of some Cierva parts and drawings and built it up yourself, you found out that it didn't go straight up and down as you'd expected and thought you must have done something wrong. So you set about trying to put it right—and somehow or other you brought it off.

"It's a pity you were in such a hurry to tell Mr. Hayward that everything in your invention had been patented before, Oscar, because if you'd made a few more inquiries, you'd have found that it hadn't." Simon Templar grinned, and patted the stunned man kindly on the shoulder. "But everything happens for the best, dear old bird; and when I tell you that the Cierva people have already made me an offer of a hundred thousand quid for the invention you've just sold me, I'm sure you'll stay and join us in a celebratory bottle of beer."

Mr. Oscar Newdick swayed slightly, and glugged a strangling obstruction out of his throat.

"I—I don't think I'll stay," he said. "I'm not feeling very well."

"A dose of salts in the morning will do you all the good in the world," said the Saint chattily, and ushered him sympathetically to the door.

# sing a song of sixpence

*by . . . John Buchan*

**Assassins surrounded the man with dancing eyes—assassins with a peculiar code of honor and responsive to a challenge.**

LEITHEN'S face had that sharp chiseling of the jaw and that compression of the lips which seem to follow upon high legal success. Also an overdose of German gas in 1918 had given his skin a habitual pallor, so that he looked not unhealthy, but notably urban. As a matter of fact he was one of the hardest men I have ever known, but a chance observer might have guessed from his complexion that he rarely left the pavements.

Burminster, who had come back from a month in the grass countries with a face like a deep-sea mariner's, commented on this one evening. "How do you manage always to look the complete Cit, Ned?" he asked. "You're as much a Londoner as a Parisian is a Parisian, if you know what I mean."

Leithen said that he was not ashamed of it, and he embarked on a eulogy of the metropolis. In London you met sooner or later everybody you had ever known; you could lay your hand on any knowledge you wanted; you

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*John Buchan, author of* THE THIRTY-NINE STEPS, GREENMANTLE, THE COURTS OF THE MORNING, *and other novels, and later, as Lord Tweedsmuir, Governor General of Canada, is one of the unique and truly distinguished names in English writing of recent decades. Here is an adventure of the Sir Edward Leithen who appears with Richard Hannay in many of Buchan's novels.*

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could pull strings that controlled the innermost Sahara and the topmost Pamirs. Romance lay in wait for you at every street corner. It was the true City of the Caliphs.

"That is what they say," said Sandy Arbuthnot sadly, "but I never found it so. I yawn my head off in London. Nothing amusing ever finds me out—I have to go and search for it, and it usually costs the deuce of a lot."

"I once stumbled upon a pretty generous allowance of romance," said Leithen, "and it cost me precisely sixpence."

Then he told us this story.

It happened a good many years ago, just when I was beginning to get on at the Bar. I spent busy days in court and chambers, but I was young and had a young man's appetite for society, so I used to dine out most nights and go to more balls than were good for me. It was pleasant after a heavy day to dive into a different kind of life. My rooms at the time were in Down Street, the same house as my present one, only two floors higher up.

On a certain night in February I was dining in Bryanston Square with the Nantleys. Mollie Nantley was an old friend, and used to fit me as an unattached bachelor into her big dinners. She was a young hostess and full of ambition, and one met an odd assortment of people at her house. Mostly political, of course, but a sprinkling of art and letters, and any visiting lion that happened to be passing through. Mollie was a very innocent lion-hunter, but she had a partiality for the breed.

I don't remember much about the dinner, except that the principal guest had failed her. Mollie was loud in her lamentations. He was a South American President who had engineered a very pretty *coup d'état* the year before, and was now in England on some business concerning the finances of his state. You may remember his name—Ramon Pelem—he made rather a stir in the world for a year or two. I had read about him in the papers, and had looked forward to meeting him, for he had won his way to power by extraordinary boldness and courage, and he was quite young. There was a story that he was partly English and that his grandfather's name had been Pelham. I don't know what truth there was in that, but he knew England well and Englishmen liked him.

Well, he had cried off on the telephone an hour before, and Mollie was greviously disappointed. Her other guests bore the loss with more fortitude, for I expect they thought he was a brand of cigar.

In those days dinners began earlier and dances later than they do today. I meant to leave soon, go back to my rooms and read

briefs, and then look in at Lady Samplar's dance between eleven and twelve. So at nine-thirty I took my leave.

Jervis, the old butler, who had been my ally from boyhood, was standing on the threshold, and in the square there was a considerable crowd now thinning away. I asked what the trouble was.

"There's been an arrest, Mr. Edward," he said in an awe-struck voice. "It 'appened when I was serving coffee in the dining room, but our Albert saw it all. Two foreigners, he said—proper rascals by their look—were took away by the police just outside this very door. The constables was very nippy and collared them before they could use their pistols—but they 'ad pistols on them and no mistake. Albert says he saw the weapons."

"Did they propose to burgle you?" I asked.

"I cannot say, Mr. Edward. But I shall give instructions for a very careful lock-up tonight."

There were no cabs about, so I decided to walk on and pick one up. When I got into Great Cumberland Place it began to rain sharply, and I was just about to call a prowling hansom, when I put my hand into my pocket. I found that I had no more than one solitary sixpence.

I could of course have paid when I got to my flat. But as the rain seemed to be slacking off, I preferred to walk. Mollie's dining room had been stuffy, I had been in court all day, and I wanted some fresh air.

You know how in little things, when you have decided on a course, you are curiously reluctant to change it. Before I got to the Marble Arch it had begun to pour in downright earnest. But I still stumped on. Only I entered the Park, for even in February there is a certain amount of cover from the trees.

I passed one or two hurried pedestrians, but the place was almost empty. The occasional lamps made only spots of light in a dripping darkness, and it struck me that this was a curious patch of gloom and loneliness to be so near to crowded streets, for with the rain had come a fine mist.

I pitied the poor devils to whom it was the only home. There was one of them on a seat which I passed. The collar of his thin shabby overcoat was turned up, and his shameful old felt hat was turned down, so that only a few square inches of pale face was visible. His toes stuck out of his boots, and he seemed sunk in a sodden misery.

I passed him and then turned back. Casual charity is an easy dope for the conscience, and I indulge in it too often. When I approached him he seemed to stiffen, and his hands moved in his pockets.

"A rotten night," I said. "Is

sixpence any good to you?" And I held out my solitary coin.

He lifted his face, and I started. For the eyes that looked at me were not those of a waster. They were bright, penetrating, authoritative—and they were young. I was conscious that they took in more of me than mine did of him.

"Thank you very much," he said, as he took the coin, and the voice was that of a cultivated man. "But I'm afraid I need rather more than sixpence."

"How much?" I asked. This was clearly an original.

"To be accurate, five million pounds."

He was certainly mad, but I was fascinated by this wisp of humanity. I wished that he would show more of his face.

"Till your ship comes home," I said, "you want a bed, and you'd be the better of a change. Sixpence is all I have on me. But if you come to my rooms I'll give you the price of a night's lodging, and I think I might find you some old clothes."

"Where do you live?" he asked.

"Close by—in Down Street." I gave the number.

He seemed to reflect, and then he shot a glance on either side into the gloom behind the road. It may have been fancy, but I thought that I saw something stir in the darkness.

"What are you?" he asked.

I was getting abominably wet, and yet I submitted to be cross-examined by this waif.

"I am a lawyer," I said.

He looked at me again, very intently.

"Have you a telephone?" he asked.

I nodded.

"Right," he said. "You seem a good fellow and I'll take you at your word. I'll follow you. . . . Don't look back, please. It's important. . . . I'll be in Down Street as soon as you. . . . *Marchons.*"

It sounds preposterous, but I did exactly as I was bid. I never looked back, but I kept my ears open for the sound of following footsteps. I thought I heard them, and they seemed to die away. I turned out of the Park at Grosvenor Gate and went down Park Lane.

When I reached the house which contained my flat, I looked up and down the street, but it was empty except for a waiting four-wheeler. But just as I turned in I caught a glimpse of someone running at the Hertfort Street end. The runner came to a sudden halt, and I saw that it was not the man I had left.

To my surprise I found the waif on the landing outside my flat. I was about to tell him to stop outside, but as soon as I unlocked the door he brushed past me and entered. My man, who did not sleep on the

premises, had left the light burning in the little hall.

"Lock the door," he said in a tone of authority. "Forgive me taking charge, but I assure you it is important."

Then to my amazement he peeled off the sopping overcoat, and kicked off his disreputable shoes. They were odd shoes, for what looked like his toes sticking out was really part of the make-up. He stood up before me in underclothes and socks, and I noticed that his underclothing seemed to be of the finest material.

"Now for your telephone," he said.

I was getting angry at these liberties.

"Who the devil are you?" I demanded.

"I am President Pelem," he said, with all the dignity in the world. "And you?"

"I?—Oh, I am the German Emperor."

He laughed. "You know you invited me here," he said. "You've brought this on yourself." Then he stared at me. "Hullo, I've seen you before. You're Leithen. I saw you play at Lord's. I was twelfth man for Harrow that year. . . . Now for the telephone."

There was something about the fellow, something defiant and debonair and young, that stopped all further protest on my part. He might or might not be President Pelem, but he was certainly not a wastrel. Besides he seemed curiously keyed up, as if the occasion were desperately important, and he infected me with the same feeling. I said no more, but led the way into my sitting room. He flung himself on the telephone, gave a number, was instantly connected, and began a conversation in monosyllables.

It was a queer jumble that I overheard. Bryanston Square was mentioned, and the Park, and the number of my house was given—to somebody. There was a string of foreign names—Pedro and Alejandro and Manuel and Alcaza—and short breathless inquiries. Then I heard—"a good fellow—looks as if he might be useful in a row," and I wondered if he was referring to me. Some rapid Spanish followed, and then, "come round at once—they will be here before you. Have policemen below, but don't let them come up. We should be able to manage alone. Oh, and tell Burton to ring up here as soon as he has news." And he gave my telephone number.

I put some coals on the fire, changed into a tweed jacket, and lit a pipe. I fetched a dressing gown from my bedroom and flung it on the sofa. "You'd better put that on," I said when he had finished.

He shook his head.

"I would rather be unencum-

bered," he said. "But I should dearly love a cigarette . . . and a liqueur brandy, if you have such a thing. That Park of yours is infernally chilly."

I supplied his needs, and he stretched himself in an arm chair, with his stockinged feet to the fire.

"You have been very good-humored, Leithen," he said. "Valdez—that's my aide-de-camp—will be here presently, and he will probably be preceded by other guests. But I think I have time for the short explanation which is your due. You believe what I told you?"

I nodded.

"Good. Well, I came to London three weeks ago to raise a loan. That was a matter of life or death for my big stupid country. I have succeeded. This afternoon the agreement was signed. I think I mentioned the amount to you—five million sterling."

He smiled and blew a smoke ring into the air.

"I must tell you that I have enemies. Among my happy people there are many rascals, and I had to deal harshly with them. 'So foul a sky clears not without a storm'—that's Shakespeare, isn't it? I learned it at school. You see, I had Holy Church behind me, and therefore I had against me all the gentry who call themselves liberators. Red Masons, anarchists, communists, that sort of crew. A good many are now reposing beneath the sod, but some of the worst remain. In particular, six followed me to England with instructions that I must not return.

"I don't mind telling you, Leithen, that I have had a peculiarly rotten time the last three weeks. It was most important that nothing should happen to me till the loan was settled, so I had to lead the sheltered life. It went against the grain, I assure you, for I prefer the offensive to the defensive. The English police were very amiable, and I never stirred without a cordon, your people and my own. The six wanted to kill me and as it is pretty easy to kill anybody if you don't mind being killed yourself, we had to take rather elaborate precautions. As it was, I was twice nearly done in. Once my carriage broke down mysteriously, and a crowd collected, and if I hadn't had the luck to board a passing cab, I should have had a knife in my ribs. The second was at a public dinner—something not quite right about the cayenne pepper served with the oysters. One of my staff is still seriously ill."

He stretched his arms.

"Well, that first stage is over. They can't wreck the loan, whatever happens to me. Now I am free to adopt different tactics and take the offensive. I have no fear of the six in my own country. There I can take precautions, and

they will find it difficult to cross the frontier or to live for six hours thereafter if they succeed. But here you are a free people, and protection is not so easy. I do not wish to leave England just yet—I have done my work and have earned a little play. I know your land and love it, and I look forward to seeing something of my friends. Also I want to attend the Grand National. Therefore, it is necessary that my enemies should be confined for a little, while I take my holiday. So for this evening I made a plan. I took the offensive. I deliberately put myself in their danger."

He turned his dancing eyes toward me, and I have rarely had such an impression of wild and mirthful audacity.

"We have an excellent intelligence system," he went on, "and the six have been assiduously shadowed. But as I have told you, no precautions avail against the fanatic, and I do not wish to be killed on my little holiday. So I resolved to draw their fire—to expose myself as ground bait, so to speak, that I might have the chance of netting them. The six usually hunt in couples, so it was necessary to have three separate acts in the play, if all were to be gathered in. The first—"

"Was in Bryanston Square," I put in, "outside Lady Nantley's house?"

"True. How did you know?"

"I have just been dining there, and heard that you were expected. I saw the crowd in the square as I came away."

"It seems to have gone off quite nicely. We took pains to let it be known where I was dining. The six, who mistrust me, delegated only two of their number for the job. They never put all their eggs in one basket. The two gentlemen were induced to make a scene, and, since they proved to be heavily armed, were taken into custody and may get a six months' sentence. Very prettily managed, but unfortunately it was the two that matter least—the ones we call Little Pedro and Alejandro the Scholar. Impatient, blundering children, both of them. That leaves four."

The telephone bell rang, and he made a long arm for the receiver. The news he got seemed to be good, for he turned a smiling face to me.

"I should have said two. My little enterprise in the Park has proved a brilliant success. . . . But I must explain. I was to be the bait for my enemies, so I showed myself to the remaining four. That was really rather a clever piece of business. They lost me at the Marble Arch and they did not recognize me as the scarecrow sitting on the seat in the rain. But they knew I had gone to earth there, and they stuck to the scent like terriers. Presently they would have found me, and there would have been shooting.

Some of my own people were in the shadow between the road and the railings."

"When I saw you, were your enemies near?" I asked.

"Two were on the opposite side of the road. One was standing under the lamp post at the gate. I don't know where the fourth was at that moment. But all had passed me more than once. . . . By the way, you very nearly got yourself shot, you know. When you asked me if sixpence was any good to me. . . . that happens to be their password. I take great credit to myself for seeing instantly that you were harmless."

"Why did you leave the Park if you had your trap so well laid?" I asked.

"Because it meant dealing with all four together, at once, and I do them the honor of being rather nervous about them. They are very quick with their guns. I wanted a chance to break up the cover, and your arrival gave it to me. When I went off two followed, as I thought they would. My car was in Park Lane, and gave me a lift; and one of them saw me in it. I puzzled them a little, but by now they must be certain. You see, my car has been waiting for some minutes outside this house."

"What about the other two?" I asked.

"Burton has just telephoned that they have been gathered in. Quite an exciting little scrap. To your police it must have seemed a bad case of highway robbery—two ruffianly looking fellows hold up a peaceful elderly gentleman returning from dinner. The odds were not quite like that, but the men I had on the job are old soldiers of the Indian wars and can move softly . . . I only wish I knew which two they have got. Burton was not sure. Alcaza is one, but I can't be certain about the other. I hope it is not the Irishman."

My bell rang very loud and steadily.

"In a few seconds I shall have solved that problem," he said gaily. "I am afraid I must trouble you to open the door, Leithen."

"Is it your aide-de-camp?"

"No. I instructed Valdez to knock. It is the residuum of the six. Now, listen to me, my friend. These two, whover they are, have come here to kill me, and I don't mean to be killed. . . . My first plan was to have Valdez here and others—so that my two enemies should walk into a trap. But I changed my mind before, I telephoned. They are very clever men and by this time they will be very wary. So I have thought of something else."

The bell rang again and a third time insistently.

"Take these," and he held out a pair of cruel little bluish revolvers. "When you open the door, you will say that the Presi-

dent is at home and, in token of his confidence, offers them these. *'Une espèce d'Irlandais, Messieurs. Vous commencez trop tard, et vous finissez trop tôt.'* Then bring them here. Quick now. I hope Corbally is one of them."

I did exactly as I was told. I cannot say that I had any liking for the task, but I was a good deal under the spell of the calm young man, and I was resigned to my flat being made a rendezvous for desperadoes. I had locked and chained and bolted the door, so it took me a few moments to open it.

I found myself looking at emptiness.

"Who is it?" I called "Who rang?"

I was answered from behind me. It was the quickest thing I have ever seen, for they must have slipped through in the moment when my eyes were dazzled by the change from the dim light of the hall to the glare of the landing. That gave me some notion of the men we had to deal with.

"Here," said the voice. I turned and saw two men in waterproofs and felt hats, who kept their hands in their pockets and had a fraction of an eye on the two pistols I swung by the muzzles.

"M. Le Président will be glad to see you, gentlemen," I said. I held out the revolvers, which they seemed to grasp and flick into their pockets with a single movement. Then I repeated slowly the piece of rudeness in French.

One of the men laughed. "Ramon does not forget," he said. He was a young man with sandy hair and hot blue eyes and an odd break in his long drooping nose. The other was a wiry little fellow, with a grizzled beard and what looked like a stiff leg.

I had to guess at my friend's plan, and was concerned to do precisely as I was told. I opened the door of my sitting room, and noticed that the President was stretched on the sofa facing the door. He was smoking and was still in his underclothes. When the two men behind me saw that he was patently unarmed they slipped into the room with a quick cat-like movement, and took their stand with their backs against the door.

"Hullo, Corbally," said the President pleasantly. "And you Manuel. You're looking younger than when I saw you last. Have a cigarette?" and he nodded towards my box on the table behind him. Both shook their heads.

"I'm glad you have come. You have probably seen the news of the loan in the evening papers. That should give you a holiday, as it gives me one. No further need for the hectic oversight of each other, which is so wearing and takes up so much time."

"No," said the man called Manuel, and there was something very grim about his quiet tones. "We shall take steps to prevent any need for that in the future."

"Tut, tut—that is your old self, Manuel. You are too fond of melodrama to be an artist. You are a priest at heart."

The man snarled. "There will be no priest at your deathbed." Then to his companion. "Let us get this farce over."

The President paid not the slightest attention but looked steadily at the Irishman. "You used to be a sportsman, Mike. Have you come to share Manuel's taste for potting the sitting rabbit?"

"We are not sportsmen, we are executioners of justice," said Manuel.

The President laughed merrily. "Superb! The best Roman manner." He still kept his eyes on Corbally.

"Damn you, what's your game, Ramon?" the Irishman asked. His freckled face had become very red.

"Simply to propose a short armistice. I want a holiday. If you must know, I want to go to the National."

"So do I."

"Well, let's call a truce. Say for two months or till I leave England—whichever period shall be the shorter. After that you can get busy again."

The one he had named Manuel broke into a spluttering torrent of Spanish, and for a little they all talked that language. It sounded like a combination service on the President, to which he good-humouredly replied. I had never seen this class of ruffian before, to whom murder was as simple as shooting a partridge, and I noted curiously the lean hands, the restless wary eyes, and the ugly lips of the type. So far as I could make out, the President seemed to be getting on well with the Irishman but to be having trouble with Manuel.

"Have ye really and truly nothing on ye?" Corbally asked finally.

The President stretched his arms and revealed his slim figure in its close-fitting pants and vest.

"Nor him there?" and he nodded towards me.

"He is a lawyer; he doesn't use guns."

"Then I'm damned if I touch ye. Two months it is. What's your fancy for Liverpool?"

This was too much for Manuel. I saw in what seemed to be one movement his hand slip from his pocket, Corbally's arm swing in a circle, and a plaster bust of Julius Caesar tumble off the top of my book case. Then I heard the report.

"Ye nasty little man," said Corbally as he pressed him to his bosom in a bear's hug.

"You are a traitor," Manuel

shouted. "How will we face the others? What will Alejandro say and Alcaza—?"

"I think I can explain," said the President pleasantly. "They won't know for quite a time, and then only if you tell them. You two gentlemen are all that remain for the moment of your patriotic company. The other four have been the victims of the English police—two in Bryanston Square and two in the Park close to the Marble Arch."

"Ye don't say!" said Corbally with admiration in his voice. "Faith, that's smart work!"

"They too will have a little holiday. A few months to meditate on politics, while you and I go to the Grand National."

Suddenly there was a sharp rat-tat at my door. It was like the knocking in *Macbeth* for dramatic effect. Corbally had one pistol at my ear in an instant, while a second covered the President.

"It's all right," said the latter, never moving a muscle. "It's General Valdez, whom I think you know. That was another argument which I was coming to if I hadn't had the good fortune to appeal to Mr. Corbally's higher nature. I know you have sworn to kill me, but I take it that the killer wants to have a sporting chance of escape. Well, there wouldn't have been the faintest shadow of a chance here. Valdez is at the door, and the English police are below. You are brave men, I know, but even brave men dislike the cold gallows."

The knocker fell again. "Let him in, Leithen," I was told, "or he will be damaging your valuable door. He has not the northern phlegm of you and me and Mr. Corbally."

A tall man in an ulster, which looked as if it covered a uniform, stood on the threshold. Someone had obscured the lights on the landing so that the staircase was dark, but I could see in the gloom other figures. "President Pelem," he began . . .

"The President is here," I said. "Quite well and in great form. He is entertaining two other guests."

The General marched to my sitting-room. I was behind him and did not see his face, but I can believe that it showed surprise when he recognized the guests. Manuel stood sulkily defiant, his hands in his waterproof pockets, but Corbally's light eyes were laughing.

"I think you know each other," said the President graciously.

"My God!" Valdez seemed to choke at the sight. "These swine! Excellency, I have—"

"You have nothing of the kind. These are friends of mine for the next two months, and Mr. Corbally and I are going to the Grand National together. Will you have the goodness to

conduct them downstairs and explain to the inspector of police below that all has gone well and that I am perfectly satisfied, and that he will hear from me in the morning? One moment. What about a stirrup-cup? Leithen, does your establishment run to a whisky and soda all round?"

It did. We all had a drink, and I clinked glasses with Manuel.

I looked in at Lady Samplar's dance as I had meant to. Presently I saw a resplendent figure arrive—the President, with the ribbon of the Gold Star of Bolivar across his chest. He was no more the larky undergraduate, but the responsible statesman, the father of his country. There was a considerable crowd in his vicinity when I got near him and he was making his apologies to Mollie Nantley. She saw me and insisted on introducing me. "I so much wanted you two to meet. I had hoped it would be at my dinner—but anyhow I have managed it." I think she was a little surprised when the President took my hand in both of his. "I saw Mr. Leithen play at Lord's in '97," he said. "I was twelfth man for Harrow that year. It is delightful to make his acquaintance, I shall never forget this meeting."

"How English he is!" Mollie whispered to me as we made our way out of the crowd.

They got him next year. They were bound to, for in that kind of business you can have no real protection. But he managed to set his country on its feet before he went down. . . . No, it was neither Manuel nor Corbally. I think it was Alejandro the Scholar.

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**NEXT MONTH—**

Scattergood Baines turns Private Eye in
*CLARENCE BUDINGTON KELLAND's*
SCATTERGOOD–DETECTIVE

Sergeant Foote gets his man in
*WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE's*
DEATH IN THE NORTH WOODS

Handsome West Meets the Big Squeak in
*JOHN CREASEY's* INSPECTOR WEST TRIUMPHS

Rare books play a role in a murder in
*RICHARD DEMING's* I WANT IT FOOLPROOF

Simon Templar listens to a lady in distress in
*LESLIE CHARTERIS'* THE NAUGHTY NIECE

*and*

Death strikes in the shadow of the Red Terror in
*BAYNARD KENDRICK's* exciting new novel,
MURDER MADE IN MOSCOW

**—in THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE**

# one white sheep

*by . . . Lewis H. Kilpatrick*

**The three rifles began cracking again. Clint knew the others were aching to return the fire but he was waiting—waiting for the moment.**

CLINT HAWKINS, high sheriff of Crag County, was doubly surprised. It was strange that the youngest brother of the killer should be the first to bring him the news this early summer afternoon. The burly sheriff, slouch hat pushed back, his sandy mustache twitching, leaned over the rolltop desk in his office and scowled at the boy.

"You Kilgores are well named, Lance," he declared. "You're murdersome and your hands are bloody. If these Kaintucky Mountain juries listened more to evidence and less to smart lawyers, that Bige would have been electrocuted years ago."

Lance Kilgore, bareheaded, standing tall and slender in dusty store clothes before the desk, flushed.

"I've never broke the law," he panted, his gold-dashed hair rumpled, his blue eyes inflamed by strain. "Bige and Tim are my brothers and Asa's my pa, but you haven't anything against me."

"No, I ain't," Sheriff Hawkins admitted. "You can't help bein'

*Kentuckian Lewis Kilpatrick, six feet plus in height, whose "whims and duties" have involved him in considerable traveling, has returned to writing after several years spent in social service and government work. His Sheriff Clint Hawkins of Crag County is, we believe you'll agree, an interesting addition to the ranks.*

of bad stock. But," he jerked his mustache, "what have you got against your own flesh and blood?"

The boy whetted his lips. "I disgust some of their ways," he replied. "I want to see 'em stopped legal. Such doin's have got us only trouble and a bad name.

"That Bige—" his teeth gritted the name. "He's Pa's by his first wife, only half kin to me. I've got plenty of reason to hate *him*."

Clint Hawkins glanced out the office window at Lance's mare, heaving at the village hitching rack in front of the courthouse.

"You've had a hard ride 'way over from Powder Creek," he said more kindly. "Take your mare down the street to my barn. Give her a good rub, water and feed—and tell my woman I said to vittle you well."

He shook his head and sighed: "I've got you to worry about now, Lance, along with Bige. Informin' is mighty dangerous, especially on your own kin."

Lance hesitated; then, with mumbled thanks, left the office. Passing him at the courthouse door, with a hasty, suspicious scrutiny, Deputy Dave Arnett entered, his usual amble quickened to a stride.

"Clint," he exclaimed, his lean face grim, "word's just come to town that Willie Bowen was shot dead in his store near Powder Creek. Several folks there seen it happen. Bige Kilgore, drunken mean, picked a fuss with him over politics. Willie never took a dram or toted a gun in his life. Clint—"

The sheriff, scribbling on a sheet of foolscap, barely looked up from his desk.

"Yes, Dave; I know. Lance fetched me the word. Bige ain't the sort to come in and give up peaceful. And he won't take to the brush and fight alone. Lance says he's denned up at home with Asa and Tim. They've got plenty of cartridges and are darin' us to come after him. We're goin'."

The grizzled deputy spat into a box of sawdust near the desk.

"Clint, you can't trust none of them Kilgores. This here's a trick. Old Asa trained all his boys to mischief. The least'un did go to school down in Lexington for a spell. But, recollect, even Lance was sired by a Kilgore."

"There's a white sheep in every flock," Sheriff Hawkins reversed the usual phrase. "His ma, Serepta, is a good, hard-used woman. It was her, saving egg and turkey money, who sent him to the Blue Grass school. Lance favors his ma."

Deputy Arnett did not argue further. He tightened his holstered belt and went to a locked

closet at the other side of the office. There he took out a Winchester, four boxes of smokeless cartridges and a tarnished canteen.

"How soon are we startin'?" he asked, breaking open the rifle and squinting through its polished barrel.

"You're startin' right now." Clint rose from his chair and handed him the folded sheet of foolscap. "This ain't a job for just me and you, Dave. You go summon Jim Fugate, Brack Morgan and Dice Butler. It's a right smart piece to the Kilgore farm. When you all get there, scatter Brack and Dice and Jim to the front and sides of the house. I'll be up in the woods on the hill behind. You come to me there.

"Bige has dodged the law several times," he added, going to the closet arsenal, "and he figgers to again. Dave, this won't be any ordinary fray."

When Sheriff Hawkins went to the barn for his horse, young Kilgore was there beside his mare.

"We're ready, Clint," he said, tying a filled cloth sack to a saddle ring. "Mis' Hawkins, knowin' how careless you are about yourself, give me this poke of vittles."

Clint Hawkins regarded him sternly. "You're stayin' here," he declared. "Lance, after what you've done, you ain't even safe with any of your cousins. My house is the only right place for you 'til this trouble's over."

The boy pleaded: "But, Clint, I've got to go. Maybe I can somehow help Ma. She's no blood kin to Bige, but she's stickin' with Pa and Tim. I just can't hide out with her in peril."

Sheriff Hawkins remembered his deputy's warning. "What's Bige ever done to you?"

" 'Ever done—?' " Lance laughed shortly. "He's cussed and lammed me since I was a brat. Calls me a sow baby because I shoot only varmints. Once that big black devil held me by the throat and made me drink myself dizzy. He mocks my book learnin', the little I've got. Ma had cash money saved to send me back to school this year. Bige stole the money—and slapped Ma when she faced him with it. Even Pa and Tim are scared of him sometime. But," Lance added, "they think different from me. They're upholdin' him now."

The sheriff turned away thoughtfully, and bridled and saddled his horse. When he spoke again, there was a kinder note in his voice:

"Lance, you've got a queer turn. All my young'uns are gals. I don't know much about boys of your time. But, if I had one, I'd want him to be a heap like you."

Young Kilgore's face brightened beneath his tawny hair.

"Then I can go?" he exclaimed eagerly. "I don't hold with killin', except for a good reason; but I'm not afraid. Please, Clint!"

Sheriff Hawkins swung himself astride the horse. "It ain't regular, son, and Dave'll blame me if anything goes wrong. But I trust you." He smiled down at the boy and led the way out of the barn lot.

The Kilgore home, many miles from the village county seat, was a large chinked cabin, crouched with its few out-buildings in a valley. There was a well at the rear, several recently cleared acres, and, except for a water gap, the place was surrounded by timbered hills.

"Everything looks mighty quiet," muttered the sheriff, standing with Lance behind a laurel thicket on the hillside back of the house. His pistol belt was heavy and he held a repeating Winchester. "That means they know we're about. Dave and the boys ought to be here soon. It's gettin' on to sundown."

Lance, unarmed, stared down into the valley.

"When Bige killed Joe Jones," he recalled, "there was another sheriff in your office. He was scared of us Kilgores, seein' Pa had got off from several shootin's and Tim was just back from the war. Bige never spent a night in the jailhouse, but stayed in the sheriff's home 'til the jury cleared him."

"My home ain't big enough for such—" Clint began, then jerked the Winchester to his shoulder, his finger on the trigger. The back door of the cabin had opened.

"Don't shoot!" cried the boy, grabbing the rifle barrel. "Please, Clint—! That's my ma!"

A woman, gray and stooped, came out of the door toward the well. Serepta carried two wooden pails. She tugged at the well chain, lifting and emptying its bucket twice. Then, bent by a heavy pail in each hand, she went back into the house. The door slammed shut behind her.

"Your menfolks know I won't harm a woman," Clint grunted. "But with water to drink, they'll hold out that much longer."

"She's my ma," was all Lance said. "This trouble isn't her fault."

Sheriff Hawkins hesitated a moment; then—

"You stay well hid here, son. I'm goin' to see if I can take Bige before any shootin' starts."

Lance protested: "You wait for Dave and them. Don't try it alone. All us Kilgores are prime shots."

Clint hitched the Winchester under his arm and started down the hillside trail.

"They won't harm me just yet," he said. "Sheriff Hawkins alive gives 'em a chance, but

Sheriff Hawkins killed, means death for all of 'em."

He went cautiously down the slope, then skirted through the woods around the clearing to the front of the cabin. The front door, too, was shut, its flanking small windows heavily boarded inside. Clint walked slowly, deliberately, into the unfenced yard.

He was within full view and easy range of the hidden defenders. He leaned his rifle against a tree, unbuckled his cartridge belt and holster, and hung them on a limb. That meant a parley.

"Bige! Bige Kilgore!" he called, a hard smile under his mustache. "Come out. I want speech with you."

There was silence from the cabin for a full minute. Then the door swung open and a dark man, bulky with muscle, slouched out onto the porch. He also was unarmed, but the sheriff knew he was covered by rifles.

"What do you want of me, Clint Hawkins?" Bige needed a shave and his black eyes were sullen. He did not leave the porch.

"You know what I want." The sheriff's smile held. "There is a murder warrant in my pocket for you. Come along peaceful, Bige. If you've got a just plea, the court'll free you again. I don't want any trouble here."

The dark mountaineer sneered. "Us Kilgores are used to trouble," he drawled. "That Willie Bowen had a right to tote a gun, same as me, and shoot first if he could. 'T ain't my fault he didn't. Clint Hawkins, I 'lowed I was killin' in self-defense."

"A judge and jury will have to settle that, Bige. I'm only the sheriff, on oath to arrest you. Don't let your contrary nature 'peril your whole family."

"This here's our home and we stick together," retorted Bige, glowering. "You get off our land. I hain't goin' with you. It's yer own damn fault now if anything happens!"

"Then let Serepta and Lance out of there," Sheriff Hawkins insisted from a double motive. "They're good folks. I don't want them hurt or mixed up with the law."

Bige growled an oath. "Lance, the sow baby, has took to the brush and hid. The old woman, we need her here."

"Let me talk with your pa, Bige. Asa will listen to reason—"

A shot from a barricaded window interrupted Clint. The bullet whined closely to his hat brim.

"I'm listenin' now!" came Asa's voice. "Me'n' Tim back everything Bige says. Your time for talkin' has run out, Clint Hawkins. Now you git!"

Bige ducked back through the door. There were no more words, no other shot. Sheriff Hawkins turned with a sigh, took the holstered belt from the limb and picked up the Winchester. Old Asa's bullet and command were a final declaration of war.

"I done my best, Lance," he said, after returning to the laurel thicket. "Anyway, they don't know your part in this. You'll be free to go home after it's over."

The boy started to speak, when a low "whip-per-will!" sounded from up the slope behind them. It was Dave Arnett, his Winchester slung over his arm.

"What's this young'un doin' here?" he demanded, slipping into the thicket beside them.

"We're goin' to need Lance," replied the sheriff. "He knows his way around down there like none of us do. I'm glad he made me bring him along."

Deputy Arnett shrugged. "A Kilgore on the side of law is sure to be a spy," he muttered. "All of 'em belong in hell."

Lance bridled: "To make more room in heaven for you Arnetts, I reckon!"

Clint chuckled and patted the boy's arm. Dave only scowled at the sarcasm.

"Well, if you want him to hear," he began shortly: "Jim Fugate's on the west side of the clearin', Brack's to the east. I'm keepin' Dice Butler in front with me. Each of us has a pistol and rifle-gun—and we ain't in no hurry to get back home."

Sheriff Hawkins told him what had happened.

"Dave, you and the boys keep watchful," he directed, "but save your bullets. The log walls of that house are a foot thick and there's no sense in just makin' a noise. Don't pull a trigger unless somebody tries to sneak out. Then you all be mighty certain it's a man person before you do shoot.

"The Injuns used to attack our grandsires just at daybreak. We'll go 'em a hour better. When I start shootin' then, Dave, you all close in and don't stop 'til we stand together over two-three dead Kilgores.

"Lance—" Clint turned to the boy. "It's almost dark now. I hate for you to risk it, but I aim to prove you."

Young Kilgore glanced at Dave Arnett, then fixed his blue eyes on Clint's stern face and straightened.

"I'm ready for anything I can do," he said.

"I noticed several piles of brush around your house, Lance, at the edges of the clearin'. Reckon you helped cut and stack 'em. Here's a box of matches. You go down and light them brush piles, one at a time, like I'll tell you.

"Dave, you get back to the

boys now. We'll give you the chance to pass on to 'em what I've told you."

Deputy Arnett nodded and disappeared into the woods.

Clint and Lance, squatting in the gathering dusk, munched sandwiches from the cloth sack, with water from a nearby spring. Night blackened the valley, then crept up the mountainside. No light shone between the chinks or through the barricaded windows of the house.

"Now, Lance," said Clint, after an hour had passed. "I reckon Dave's had time to make the rounds. You get goin'—but keep to cover."

The boy grinned. "I certainly know my own farm—" and he slipped away into the darkness.

Clint, his rifle ready, followed him by imagination down the hillside trail and into the bottomlands. Some minutes, and a flame leaped from a brush pile at the west of the clearing. The flame spread quickly, lighting the yard. The cabin, in clear relief, seemed to crouch lower in the valley. An irregular volley of shots came from the house. Clint smiled. There was no answering fire from his possemen.

Another hour passed. The flames had shrunk to embers. Then, to the east, there was a new glow and distant crackling. The besieged Kilgores centered their bullets on that front. There was no wind, and the house and out-buildings were not endangered. Cleared fields beyond the ignited brush protected the timber. Lance's timing was perfect.

"He's still safe," Clint Hawkins assured himself. "Trust a mountain boy to hide like an Injun!"

He knew where to look next, the front of the yard which Dave Arnett and Dice Butler were covering from that further mountainside. There would be a longer interval now. The Kilgores must be kept guessing.

"They're not used to this kind of fightin'," the sheriff reasoned. "All the shootin's from their side—and nothin' to aim at but fire. They can't tell where we're at or how many there are of us, or what we'll do next."

The three rifles within the house began cracking again. Clint knew that Dice and Dave's fingers ached to return the aimless volleys, but they obeyed orders. The third brush heap was the largest and its flames lighted all that side of the valley. It was still burning luridly when the sheriff heard a muffled whistle down the trail.

"Lance, I reckon you've got your menfolks near crazy," he chuckled. "Your ma's a good woman, free of guilt, and she won't mind. But Bige and Asa and Tim, with blood on their hands, must think Old Satan himself is finally after 'em."

The boy, exhausted, sank to

the ground beside Clint and joined in his laughter.

"This is the most fun I've had since I came home from Lexington," he said. "But—we haven't got Bige yet. He won't give up even to hell fire while he's denned safe down there."

"He won't dare run for it, neither. For all Bige knows, me and my boys are hidin' right behind them hot ashes. That brush has kept the whole place lit."

Lance looked up at the clear, star sprinkled sky. There was no moon.

"I'll touch off that pile down below us now," he said after a while, rising. "Then, Clint, the rest of this is up to you."

The burly sheriff nodded and his right hand smoothed the rifle barrel lying across his knees.

"Yes," he drawled. "It won't be so much fun later. Anyway, Lance, you're doin' your full part. I'm obliged to you, and I'd better say it now. You're one white sheep Kilgore."

Clint Hawkins was especially uneasy for the boy this time. Lance's kinsmen, for all their ignorance and superstition, were not fools. They would know that the next fire must be at the rear of the house.

The sheriff, leaning over the laurel bank, his finger on the Winchester trigger, watched the blurred shape of the boy zigzagging stealthily down the wooded slope. It was the last hour before the darkest hour on the eve of dawn.

The faint flicker of a match in the yard below. The smash of a rifle from a rear window. A second sharp report. The flame went out.

Clint waited, breathing heavily. Then another glow of fire, taking hold, spreading. Three bullets spat toward it.

The sheriff was half way down the mountainside when he met Lance, one hand before him, groping through the gloom.

"Son, did they hit you that time?"

"Yes, Clint. My left arm. I can feel the blood, but the bone isn't broke."

Clint Hawkins gripped his right arm. "We've got to get back to the laurel before the light shows us up. I'll doctor you."

The sheriff, when they were safe again, tore open the clammy sleeve and traced the blood on the flesh with his finger tips. Using his bandana, he bandaged the wound tightly.

"Doc Hardin would do a heap better job," he muttered; "but that' ll hold you 'til you get back to town." He saw, even in the dark, that the boy's face was pale. "You ain't lost much blood —that's only a deep scratch— but you're tuckered out. Sit down against this tree, son. Here's some water."

Lance soon began to nod, breathing fitfully. Clint Hawk-

ins, crouching beside him, kept his eyes on the rear door of the house. Dew dripped from the trees. The rank odor of the further burned brush seeped up the slope. An icy lizzard scurried over one of the sheriff's knees.

The boy sat up suddenly.

"I've got a feelin'—" He gripped Sheriff Hawkins' shoulder with his right hand and pushed himself to his feet, peering down into the backyard. "Clint, loan me your rifle."

"Lance, you be careful of that arm. I'll give the signal when the time comes. It ain't long now. You stay right here, safe."

The flames of the last fire were dimming. Darkness again shrouded the valley. Only the rear of the cabin now was in false twilight.

"Them Kilgores are thirsty again," murmured Clint. "I don't wonder."

The back door had opened. Out from it, a bucket in each hand, came a figure in the familiar dress, wearing a sunbonnet. It was several rods to the well. There the bonneted face turned swiftly from side to side and up the slope.

Clint, relaxing his grip on the Winchester, felt it jerked from his hands. Lance stepped quickly to the edge of the laurel bank, threw the butt to his shoulder and squinted down the barrel.

"Don't, Lance—!" Sheriff Hawkins jumped up. "Not now. You'll have the boys shootin' and chargin' before I'm ready."

The figure at the well dropped the buckets, tore off the sunbonnet and pulled up the skirts. The Winchester banged. Clint saw the figure halt abruptly, stagger a few steps, then crumple near the well.

"Lance Kilgore," he gasped, "that blood on your arm's gone to your head! You're crazy! Why, you've done killed your own ma!"

Irregular shots sounded from the three other sides covering the log house. The possemen were closing in. There were no answering bullets from the chinked walls.

Lance, grinning, handed the rifle back to Sheriff Hawkins.

"Aw, Clint, I just aimed at his leg," he said— "the leg that ain't no kin to me. I reckon that ends the fight. Pa and Tim won't go on resistin' now. They know they haven't nothin' to gain."

Sheriff Hawkins, staring through the darkness at him, suddenly understood.

"Son," he swore, "if your ma can't send you back to school, me and Dave Arnett and several other fellers will. We'll buy Serepta a new dress and sunbonnet too. That Bige, to double his shame, ought to be electrocuted in them woman's clothes he put on tryin' to escape the law."

# the king's brahm

*by . . . Edgar Wallace*

**He'd seen the man who'd been with the King earlier. Was he really a good man, or was he the evil man she suspected?**

THERE is a certain type of man, common to both hemispheres and possibly to all races, though he is more sharply outlined when he is English or American, who thrives on disaster.

You meet him today seedy and unshaven, and slip him the trifling loan he asks; you turn aside tomorrow to avoid him, but beware how you cross the street the next day lest his lacquered limousine strikes you into an unconsciousness whence even the fragrance of his considerable cigar shall not recall you.

For weeks, months even, such men occupy suites furnished like the model offices that look so well in catalogues. They have clerks and managers, and their names are painted on glass doors. Elevator boys respect them, and even policemen smile at them as they pass.

Then all of a sudden they vanish. New names appear on the office indicator, new staffs occupy their suites; and inquiry as to their whereabouts elicits brusque and negative replies. Months afterwards you meet

*During the years between 1919 and his death in the early 1930's, Edgar Wallace won a unique reputation for turning out mystery novels of uniformly high quality in what seemed endless numbers. A man of varied background, Wallace turns here to what happens when a naive man meets a commercial magician.*

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them unexpectedly in country towns, a little shabby, a little furtive, but immensely enthusiastic about the new patent cinder-sifter that they are selling on commission. Then they seem to vanish out of life, and their acquaintances, when they think of them at all, wonder whether they are in the poorhouse or only in gaol . . . and we continue in our speculation until one night the flash of a diamond shirt-stud in a box at the Opera betrays their presence in the role of the newest millionaire.

They live in a world of their own; in some mysterious way they carry their own population. Neither the men they meet nor the businesses they operate, touch, even remotely, the everyday life of ordinary people.

As a rule they are wistful, relentless men, with a gift for telling circumstantial lies in an easy absent-minded way, which is the only way lies can be told convincingly.

Mr. Benjamin Thannett was such a phenomenon. He was a commercial magician at the wave of whose slim hands mining corporations grew in a night, and substantial boards of directors were created in the wink of an eye. He himself never accepted a directorship. His name was absent from the innumerable prospectuses he had composed, nor did it appear as the holder of any important blocks of shares.

In such companies as he promoted there were only two classes, and only one that mattered. They were the shareholders and the money-holders. He invariably had a property to sell—even in his day of dire necessity he could produce an oil field from his pocket book with the surprising celerity of the conjurer who extracts a rabbit from a top hat.

Sometimes, so alluring were these properties that the mere announcement of their possession filled the letter box of his office with the appeals of would-be sharers of fortune. Thereafter came a period of prosperity which invited the envy of the honest poor. A period of luncheon parties, at which the principal stockholders of the new company received their first and only dividend in the shape of a full meal and faultless cigars.

Mr. Thannett's path through life was littered with the crippled remains of little optimists who had reached greedily towards him for easy wealth and had been shriveled at a touch.

There were probably widows amongst the debris; very likely there were orphans too, though this is doubtful, for the widow and the orphan with money have trustees and guardians to protect them. More pathetic were the fat and comfortable little men of business whose accumulations had vanished into the magician's

pocket. There was a suicide or two, but such things are inevitable.

Mr. Thannett grew prosperous after many vicissitudes which involved occasional disappearance from the haunts of men, and he might have reached the summit of his ambition (there was an unreachable woman upon it) but for the fact that in the course of a certain operation he came into conflict with the imponderable factor of tradition.

In the year 1920 Mr. Thannett, returning from a tour of Europe, the possessor of five square miles of forest land whereon was sited an oil well of dubious value, was seized of a brilliant idea. From this, and the five square miles of Bulgarian territory, purchased from a drunken farmer for a song, grew "The Balkan Oil and Timber Corporation." The originator of this great idea had a confederate whom he described variously as "my partner" and "our General Manager," one Steelson, a man as stout in build as himself but less presentable—for Thannett prided himself upon his gentlemanly appearance.

On the day after his return to Paris, which for the time being was his headquarters, he sat with Mr. Steelson in his room at the Grand Hotel, a large scale map of Northern Bulgaria spread on the bed, and outlined the possibilities of the new venture.

Steelson's puckered face creased discouragingly.

"You can't do much with eight square kilometres, Ben," he said, shaking his head, "not in Europe anyway. Why not go to New York? It'll look bigger from there."

Ben Thannett pulled at his cigar thoughtfully. He was a tall, full-blooded man with faded eyes and a moustache of startling blackness.

"I think not," he said carefully. "There are a whole lot of reasons why I don't want to go to America just now."

Mr. Steelson wrinkled his nose.

"They've fogot that Cobalt Silver proposition of yours by now," he said contemptuously. "A sucker is born every minute, but one dies every thirty seconds."

"Maybe they do, but there are enough left alive to tell the tale," said the other decisively. "No, it's London or nothing. They don't feel very bad about Bulgaria in England, and besides, nobody knows anything about the country. I met a man on the Orient Express—he was English—who raved about Bulgaria; said it was the finest country in Europe, full of minerals and timber and oil. That got me thinking. At Milan I got into conversation with two or three other men who were coming through and passed on all this

oil and mineral talk. They lapped it up, Steel—like puppies round a dripper of cream. It appears that Bulgaria is one of the nine promised lands—like Mesopotamia used to be and Central Africa, until they found 'em out."

"Five square miles," murmured Steelson, shaking his head. "Now if it was five hundred . . . !"

Benjamin had taken off his coat for greater comfort and was pacing the floor, stopping now and again to survey the roofs and chimneys of Paris. He stopped and started to smile.

"There's a million hectares of land to be got," he said deliberately; "a million good hectares, worth twenty *leva* a hectare before the war—"

"What's a *leva?*" asked the other. "I don't know these Balkan monies."

"A lev is a franc, roughly," explained Benjamin patiently.

"Twenty million francs! Where are we going to get twenty million francs?" demanded Mr. Steelson disgustedly.

"There may be oil on it: a lot of people think there is," Benjamin went on, sitting on the edge of the bed, his hands in his trousers pockets. "You can't buy land in that part of the country just now under two pounds sterling a hectare."

"Then what in hell are you talking about?" asked the exasperated Steelson. "We've got under eighty thousand francs at the Foncier."

Mr. Benjamin Thannett resumed his pacing.

"I have no sympathy with Germans," he said, with seeming inconsequence; "it will be one regret of my life, Steelson, that I was detained in the Argentine by that Cattle Syndicate of mine during the war. I'd have given anything to have been in the Hindenburg line, or in the Argonne, Steelson—"

"Oh, shut up," snarled his partner. "What's Germany got to do with it?"

"And I'm a democrat at heart, Steelson—you know that? I hate these hereditary institutions. They're tyrannies, Steel. They crush the masses into—into pulp, and batten—that's the word—batten on the likes of me and you. Do you agree?"

But Mr. Steelson was speechless. He could only stare, and Benjamin, who had drama in his system, beamed delightedly at the sensation he had created. Now he produced his climax.

Unlocking the bag that had accompanied him on his travels, he opened it, and after a search, brought out a small red box, not unlike a jewel case. Inside, reposing on a plush bed, was a big irregular chunk of amber.

The fascinated Mr. Steelson rose and examined the trophy.

"Amber," he said wonderingly. "What is that inside?"

"That," replied Benjamin, in his most impressive tone, "is a small butterfly. It's rare. There are only about ten pieces of amber in the world that contain a butterfly; it cost me five thousand francs, Steel."

And then Steelson exploded, speaking, it would seem, in his capacity as partner rather than general manager.

". . . we'll be down to our last cent at the end of this week," he said violently, "and you fool away money . . ."

Benjamin allowed his friend to exhaust himself before he explained.

"You're a fool, and you always have been a fool," he said calmly. "Finding that was the biggest luck I have had in years. I saw it by accident in Milan as I was strolling through the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele. It came from heaven, that bit of amber, when I was puzzling my brains sick as to how I could get an introduction to King Gustavus . . ."

"All right," said Steelson helplessly, "let's all go mad together."

The light faded in the sky, and the streets of Paris were aglitter with light before Mr. Benjamin Thannett had concluded the narrative of his scheme. When they went down to dinner together, the Balkan Oil & Timber Corporation was born.

The chief asset of the Company, in happy ignorance of the part for which he had been cast, was at that moment listening to an excellent municipal orchestra some seven hundred miles from Paris.

The good people of Interlaken, who gathered on warm evenings to drink beer or sip at sugary ices in the big open Kursaal, knew the gray man very well, for, unlike his fellows in misfortune, he was a permanent resident. Guides, escorting gaping tourists, lowered their voices and with a sidelong jerk of their head indicated the thin figure which sat near the orchestra and eked out one china mug of beer so that it lasted the whole evening. He was always shabbily dressed, generally in a faded gray suit that was worn at the elbows. The wristbands were frayed, his collar was usually in the same condition. Generally he came alone, but occasionally a pretty girl came with him, a delightful lady who upset all local traditions by the invariable luxury of her dress. For her very expensiveness confounded that section of public opinion which would have it that King Gustavus XXV of Hardenberg was reduced to starvation, that he slept miserably in the cheapest room at the Victoria, and that only by the charity of the proprietor.

The other section having taken the trouble to make inquiries, refuted this statement.

His Majesty had a suite of ten

rooms: his bill was paid with punctilious regularity, and there was no need to explain away either the extensive wardrobe of the Princess Stephanie, his daughter, or the poverty of his own attire.

It was notorious that in the palmiest days of his prosperity the king had amongst others, a weakness for old clothing nor was his air of abstraction and melancholy peculiar to his present situation.

"No doubt the poor man is thinking of his magnificent castles and palaces," said the burgess of Interlaken pityingly. "Such is the penalty of defeat and revolution."

But Gustavus, sitting with his chin in the palm of his thin hand, his gloomy eyes staring into vacancy, regretted nothing except the loss of his wonderful collection of butterflies.

The King's passion for collecting was commonly paragraphed through the press of Europe; the folks of Interlaken should at heart have known as much as Mr. Benjamin Thannett discovered when he began to read up the character and history of the owner of the Hardenberg Concession.

Kingship of a small German state had meant little to Gustavus. It had been something of an embarrassment. Chief of the advantages was that, as the head of the state, he was not amenable to certain rigid conventions, and might dispense with the interminable business of wearing stiff uniforms. Only on state occasions, at great Potsdam reviews, or council meetings, did he groaningly dress himself in the skin-tight uniform of the Hardenberg Fusiliers of the Guard (of which he was Colonel), and for the rest of the time, wearing an old knickerbocker suit, with a butterfly net in his hand and a specimen-box slung at his side, he prowled the Steinhart Forest in search of notable additions to his museum.

More kingly in the power he wielded was the tall, stout man who sat, a month or so after the Paris meeting, at the King's little table, smoking a cigar of great size and quality. The habitues of the Kursaal, who were growing accustomed to the stranger, decided that he must be an ex-minister of the deposed monarch, and probably one of the highest birth, for his manner was free and his laughter at times loud and unrestrained. And every time he laughed, the King winced a little, and his hand went nervously to his white moustache with an embarrassed gesture.

Mr. Benjamin Thannett was neither well born nor well mannered. He was very sensitive to his own conceptions of humor, and his laughter meant no more than that he said something or thought something which was amusing to himself.

"I don't know why I take so much trouble," he said, with a gesture of indifference; "your forest land is not really worth a great deal to me; none of these Bulgarian concessions can be worked for years. Why, there isn't a railway for two hundred kilometres, and you can buy land at a *lev* a hectare, and *leva* work out at two hunded to a dollar!"

The King shifted uncomfortably.

"Yes, yes," he said nervously. "I am greatly obliged to you, Mr. Thannett, for taking so much trouble."

"It is a pleasure," said Benjamin, with truth. He had ceased saying "your Majesty" three weeks before, and had now dispensed with the "Sir."

The measure of this gentle exile had been taken. Mr. Thannett's personality was dominant, and instinct told him that he was near to an achievement.

"I've bought a lot of land lately," he went on, flicking the ash of his cigar upon the polished floor. "I acquired a tract in the Ukraine the other day for a million. I don't suppose I shall ever see the money again," he added carelessly. "At the same time I don't want you to be a loser. Given the time, I can get big money for your land. That is why it interests me. Money to people like me means nothing. It is the thrill of the battle: pitting my genius against my business rivals—that is the thing that keeps me going."

"Naturally, naturally," said the King hastily, in terror of hurting the feelings of his guest. "I appreciate all you have done, Mr. Thannett. In fact, I am delighted that I have had the opportunity of meeting you—I am rather conscience-stricken about having taken your beautiful gift. By the way, I have verified the genus of that insect—it is the *Lycana Icirus.*"

"That was nothing," said Mr. Benjamin Thannett airily. "Absolutely nothing. I heard of your interest in *Lepidoptera,* and as I happened to have an amber in my collection, I thought, as a fellow-collector, it would be an act of courtesy to pass it on to you."

The King murmured his thanks.

"Now what I should suggest," said Mr. Benjamin Thannett, suddenly the practical business man, "is for you to sell your land at a nominal figure to the Company I have formed for the purpose. We would market that property in England, and I feel that we should get a better price if your name was not associated with the sale. You quite understand there is still a great deal of prejudice in Europe against Germany."

The old man nodded.

"That is quite understandable," he said, and then with a

note of anxiety, "would not your method mean a protracted negotiation? Of course there is no need to hurry, but—I have been considering the sale of this land for some time. It was given to my grandfather by his cousin, the Emperor of Austria, and although it has not been a profitable possession, the land has always been highly spoken of. I'm sure you realize Mr. Thannett," he went on, with some evidence of reluctance, "that my position here in Switzerland is a very anxious one. I left my country at short notice, and my funds are not inexhaustable."

Benjamin nodded slowly.

"I can promise you," he said impressively, "that the sale will be completed within a few weeks. I will credit your estate with half a million sterling, and that amount, less a trifling fee for conveyance, will be in your hands within a month."

The King studied the interior of his beer mug, as though it contained a solution to all his problems.

"Very good, Mr. Thannett," he said; "I will arrange the transfer to your Company tomorrow. May I ask you," he said, as they descended the broad stairs leading into the garden, "not to mention this to Her Serene Highness? She has—" he hesitated, "other views."

He was too polite to tell Mr. Benjamin Thannett that Her Serene Highness disliked the Company promoter instinctively; indeed, it was unnecessary, for Benjamin was sensitive to atmosphere.

As they walked along the dark avenue, a man came from the shadows of the trees and fell in behind them. Thannett looked round quickly.

"It is my Stirrup Man," said the King. "He always accompanies me; you must have noticed him before, Mr. Thannett."

Thannett breathed a sigh of relief.

"No, I haven't noticed him before," he said, more respectfully. "Why do you call him a stirrup man, sir?"

The King laughed softly.

"In Hardenberg they call him the King's Brahm. The Brahms have been in the service of our family, as personal attendants, for eight hundred years, Mr. Thannett, and one of the family has always stood at the King's stirrup for all those years. They have followed them into exile, for I am not the first of my race to be driven from Hardenberg, and they have stood with them in their prosperity. This is John Brahm, the eldest of six brothers, and he has a son who will serve my daughter and my daughter's son when I am gone. They are the common people in Hardenberg who have a coat-of-arms and a motto—'To do all things, to risk all things, and suffer all

things for the King's comfort.' "

"Very interesting," said Mr. Thannett.

He accompanied the King to the hotel and took his leave in the lobby.

A girl who was sitting curled up in a chair reading a French magazine rose as the King entered, and dropped a little curtsey.

"Your millionaire kept you late tonight, father," she said, with a smile.

"You don't like my millionaire," said the King grimly. "My dear, we cannot afford to have likes or dislikes. He is an extremely useful man."

She came and put her arm round his shoulder and gently shook him.

"He gave you a beautiful butterfly in a beautiful piece of amber," she said, with gentle mockery, "and he probably bought it out of a curiosity shop in order to get an introduction to you."

"My dear, it came from his private collection," he said, a little testily. "Why are you so prejudiced, Stephanie? I suppose because he is an Englishman?"

"Is he?" she asked carelessly. "No, it would make no difference to me if he were a Turk, and Heaven knows I dislike the Turks intensely. But I feel that he is an adventurer."

"You mustn't say t h o s e things," said her father seriously. "I tell you he is a very useful man. We need money very badly, dear; besides—"

"Does John Brahm like him?" asked the girl quietly.

The King looked at the solid figure standing stiffly in the doorway.

John Brahm was a tall man of tawny complexion and dull yellow hair. He wore the gaily embroidered waistcoat, the spotless linen shirt open at the neck, and the knee-breeches and heavy shoes which formed the peasant garb of Hardenberg.

"Well, John Brahm," asked the King, a little impatiently, "you saw the excellency who was with me tonight. Is he a good man or a bad man?"

"Majesty, he is a bad man," said John Brahm.

"You're a fool, John Brahm," said the old man, but the girl's eyes were dancing with laughter.

"Listen to the words of the King's Brahm," she said. "Really father, aren't you just a little too trusting?"

King Gustavus frowned, and then a twinkle came into his eyes also.

"In a month you will be very sorry that you have maligned my poor friend," he said, and the girl suddenly became serious.

"In a month?" she repeated. "Why, what is going to happen, father?"

But he would not satisfy her curiosity, and went off to his

room with his stolid retainer walking in his rear.

The Princess Stephanie stayed up very late that night. She was uneasy to a point of panic. Her father had never discussed business affairs with her, but she had some idea of the state of his finances.

Her dislike of Benjamin Thannett was instinctive. It was not his vulgarity, his blatant assertiveness, or the apparent meanness of his birth which made her curl up in his presence —it was not that queer sixth sense which warns women of personal peril; his presence brought a vague unease and feeling of resentment which she could not analyze. He had come to dinner soon after his presentation of the introductory butterfly, and she had felt repelled, sickened, almost frightened by him.

He seemed to embody a terror to her future and the future of her house.

She rose early in the morning after a restless night, and going to the telegraph office, dispatched a wire to the lawyer in Geneva who had acted for her father. He arrived at Interlaken in time for dinner, a meal which King Gustavus did not grace by his presence.

"I am sorry my father is out," said the troubled girl. "He went to the Kursaal soon after five and told me not to wait dinner for him."

The old lawyer laughed.

"You're not worried about His Majesty," he said. "I presume he is accompanied by that gigantic guard of his."

"John Brahm," she smiled. "Oh, yes, John will be with him. No, I'm not worried about father's bodily comfort," and she proceeded to relate something of her fears.

"Thannett," repeated the lawyer thoughtfully. "I seem to know that name; yes, of course; he is the company promoter. We had some trouble with him in Geneva three years ago. He bought a clock factory for promotion purposes. I don't think the factory proprietors ever received their money. We had several inquiries about him. Yes, yes, I remember now very well indeed. The man is a swindler, but one of those swindlers who keep on the right side of the law. I had no idea he was in Switzerland. But His Majesty has nothing to sell?"

The girl had gone suddenly white.

"We have land in Bulgaria," she said slowly. "I never thought of that! It is the only property we have. We left Hardenberg with a few thousand marks, and His Majesty had some property in Switzerland which he sold after we arrived. Oh, Doctor Vallois, if we have lost the

Hardenberg Concession, we are ruined!"

And then King Gustavus arrived, unusually cheerful, a smile on his gray face, and a certain jauntiness in his air, which made the girl's heart sink still further. Without any preliminary she demanded:

"Have you sold the Hardenberg land, father?"

He looked astonished.

"Yes, my dear," he said, with a little chuckle. "I have been worrying about the value, and I am happy to tell you that I have received a magnificent price. Hello, Doctor?"

He greeted the lawyer almost jovially.

"What brings you to Interlaken?"

"I sent for the Doctor," said the girl quietly. "I had the feeling that something like this would happen. Father, did your Mr. Thannett pay you very much money?"

"To be exact, he paid me a thousand francs," said the King humorously.

"A thousand francs!" she said horrified. "Surely you are joking?"

"No, I'm teasing you," said the King. "I certainly received only a thousand francs, but that was the nominal sum we agreed upon."

He explained the situation more fully, and the lawyer listened open-mouthed.

"But surely your Majesty has not sold this property? You retain some lien on it?"

"I have shares in the company," said the King impatiently, "shares which I think will most probably produce more than I anticipate."

There was dead silence.

"Have a copy of your agreement or contract?" asked the lawyer.

The King passed the paper across the table, and watched the lawyer a little uneasily as he read line by line and clause by clause. Presently he finished.

"You have no claim whatever upon Mr. Thannett nor upon his company," he said. "He has the power without consultation of so increasing the capital that your shares will be valueless. It is an old trick of his."

"Do you mean—" cried the old man, half starting up.

"I mean that your Majesty has been swindled," said the lawyer, "and this paper is not worth the stamps that are on it. Thannett undertakes to do nothing except to sell the property to the best advantage. To whose advantage it will be I can guess."

"I will notify the police," gasped the King.

The lawyer shook his head.

"This document is legal. The man has acted legally. He is within the law, and your Majesty cannot touch him," he said. "The agreement has been drawn up by

one who is skillful in such matters, as I can testify."

"You mean I shall get nothing more than a thousand francs I have received?" asked the old man huskily.

"I mean," said the lawyer, "that the document to which you have signed your name, and which is in Mr. Thannett's possession, deprives you of every right you have to your Bulgarian property, without conferring any advantage or rights whatever upon yourself."

The girl looked from her father to the lawyer, and then her eyes strayed to the tall, broad figure of the King's Brahm standing stiffly behind his master's chair. She rose.

"John Brahm," she commanded, "you will attend me."

She turned and walked from the dining room, and John Brahm followed heavily.

Mr. Benjamin Thannett had left Interlaken by the evening train. He stopped at Spiez to snatch a hasty meal, then boarded the electric train that connects with the Oberland railway. He came to Montreux at eleven o'clock that night, and Mr. Steelson greeted him on the platform.

"You're late," said Mr. Steelson fretfully. "Did you get it?"

"Did I get it?" repeated the other scornfully. "Of course I got it. These damn Swiss railway officials kept the train back an hour at Zweisimmen to pick up an aeroplane passenger who had lost the train at Spiez. I'd like to have the reorganization of these railways, Steel."

"I dare say you would," said the unimpressed Steelson. "Come over and have a bite; there's time before the Simplon comes in. She's late too."

They went down the stairs to the Suisse Hotel, and over their coffee Mr. Thannet told his story.

"There ought to be a society for the protection of Kings," he said humorously. "It was the easiest thing. Do you think he'll kick? That daughter of his won't take it without a fight."

"What can she do?" asked the other, examining the contract with an expert's eye. "We can sell in Paris on this. There are three men on the Bourse who'll take this contract, and make as much out of it as we shall. Bulgarian land is booming just now."

"It makes you think, Steel," ruminated Mr. Thannett. "Here's a fellow who was a King, had all the power that a man could have. A real King, Steel. And here am I—a nothing, so to speak, and I bested him—it was like taking money away from a child. And I've got the law behind me." He laughed till he shook at the thought. "It's a wonderful thing, the law," he added piously.

"Give you three brandies, and

you'll preach a sermon," said the practical Mr. Steelson.

"No, you needn't worry about this contract; it meets ninety-nine contingencies out of a hundred and I can't think what the hundredth could be. Come along if you want to catch that train."

They boarded the northern express, and took their places in the two sleeping compartments which Steelson had reserved.

"It's brains that win," was Benjamin's last remarks as he turned into his cabin.

"I dare say," said the other. "Good-night."

Mr. Benjamin Thannett stretched himself luxuriously upon the bed. He did not want to undress until the frontier station had passed, and the Custom House officials had made their inspection; but the gentle jogging of the train made him doze. He woke suddenly; a man was in his compartment; he must have come in and closed the door behind him. Benjamin had a momentary glimpse of a tall, uncouth figure in ready-made clothes which did not quite fit, and then the lamp was switched out.

"What are you—" he began, but a hand, large and heavy, closed on his throat.

When the Custom House officials came to search the carriage, they found it in darkness. Switching on a light, they saw a man lying on his side. Benjamin Thannett was quite dead when they found him, for his neck had been broken, and Steelson searching the clothes in frantic haste, failed to discover the contract over which they had gloated an hour before. That was in the pocket of John Brahm's coat. John Brahm at that moment was tramping back to the Swiss frontier station.

Mr. Benjamin Thannett had provided for all contingencies except the tradition of the House of Brahm, which was to do all things, and risk all things, and suffer all things for the King's comfort.

# saints on the sidewalk

*by . . . Morris L. West*

**What was the secret behind the Saints, and their connection with the sinister International drug ring?**

A MAN was dying in the back room of a Naples slum.

There were knife wounds in his chest and in his back. His life was bubbling away in the small, bloody foam that formed at the corners of his mouth.

A gray-faced friar, in the dusty habit of St. Francis, bent over him, holding his hand, whispering into his ear the words of repentance, waiting for some sign that would justify the pronouncing of the words of forgiveness.

Back in the shadows stood two other men: Lieutenant Giorgio Carrese of the Guardia di Finanza, and Mike Pelletri, Treasury Agent from Brooklyn.

They too were waiting for a sign.

Suddenly, the dying man heaved himself upward on the bed. His eyes stared wildly, his mouth twitched and he spoke four gasping words:

". . . Sono . . . santi . . . sulla strada . . ."

Then his throat filled up with blood and he died.

The friar made the sign of the cross and pronounced the for-

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mula of absolution, then he took a book from his breast-pocket and a small phial of oil and began to administer the last rites. Carlo Malinconico, gangster and drug runner was legally dead, but his Church gave him the benefit of the doubt and offered him the last mercies, long after the legal presumption that he was beyond them.

The two officials stood awkwardly with bowed heads until the drab little ceremony was over. The friar put away his book and his phial, took off his stole and folded it carefully. His old eyes were somber. Lieutenant Carrese questioned him:

"He said, 'There are saints on the street.' What did it mean, Padre?"

The friar shrugged unhappily.

"Who knows except God? Sometimes it happens that evil men are granted at the end a vision of goodness and the grace of repentance."

"Do you believe that, Padre?"

"I hope it," said the friar, flatly. He looked down at the dead man, then turned towards the door. "He belongs to you, now, gentlemen. I have done as much as I can for him."

He pulled the cowl of his habit up over his head and walked to the door. Carrese and Pelletri looked at each other.

"Well," said Mike Pelletri, "what do you think?"

"I need a cigarette," said Giorgio Carrese.

The Treasury man broke open a fresh packet. They lit up and smoked a few moments in silence. Then Carrese spoke again:

"A man like this dies the way he has lived. He had made a deal with us, remember? He would give us information on the export routes for heroin, in return for immunity and protection. He was doing it for vengeance—because someone stole his girl."

"So . . . ?" Pelletri blew smoke-rings in the musty air.

"So . . ." said Carrese, quietly, "his last thought is not of God or repentance but of vengeance. His last words, too."

"There are saints on the street."

"More exactly, it means 'there are saints on the sidewalk.'" Giorgio Carrese was a polyglot and proud of his subtle understanding of tongues.

Pelletri shrugged. He had come a long way in the hope that this operation with the Guardia di Finanza would seal finally the outlet through which processed heroin was shipped to the United States. Ten minutes with Carlo Malinconico would have given him all he needed. But Carlo Malinconico was dead and his only legacy was a meaningless Italian tag. Which didn't help at all.

"It might help," said Carrese,

soberly, "if only we could relate it to his dying thought."

"If . . . if . . . if!!" Pelletri was unhappy. He was in no mood for airy speculation. "Look! Malinconico's dead. He was killed to stop his mouth. Next step, it seems to me, is to find the guy that killed him."

"No, my friend. No. We do better if we follow the line we have been given. We look for the saints on the sidewalk."

"For Pete's sake . . . !" Pelletri was an Italian, too, and his temper was volatile and uncertain. Just in time he remembered that he was a long way from home, that he depended on Carrese for all the assistance he was likely to get in Italy—and Naples, which is not Italy at all! He forced a grin and said, resignedly, "Okay, Giorgio, it's your case. Where do we start?"

"We find ourselves a bar and drink coffee," said Giorgio Carrese.

They left Carlo Malinconico in the care of a scrubby detachment of police and clattered down the worn stone steps that led into a narrow alley. The sky was blotted out by lines of washing and they stumbled over piles of refuse and sprawling children as they made their way towards the top end of the Via Roma.

They found a table in a bright little bar and drank three cups of bitter coffee and a glass of strega without coming a step closer to the truth.

Mike Pelletri's patience was fraying at the edges, but the young Guardia official seemed to be enjoying himself. He was like a student puzzling over a classic problem.

"We start with the assumption that the last thought of the man was the same as his first—vengeance. He tries to give us the information for which we came."

"Sure . . . sure! And he tells us there are saints on the sidewalk. So what?"

"We think about that a moment. We take the general proposition that there are good and saintly people on the sidewalks of every city—even of Naples, where the percentage of good people is probably quite low." Carrese grinned, disarmingly. "I agree that this is too vague for our purposes. So we think further. We remember that one of the commonest sights in Naples is the little brown friar or the black sister who goes about shaking a little tin and begging money for the Orphanage or the Church or the Home for old people. It is a good disguise and a safe role for a criminal contact."

Mike Pelletri sat up and began to be interested. Carrese wasn't the bland fool he sometimes looked. His point was clear

enough: an investigator in Naples had to think like the Neapolitans—a tortuous process, almost impossible for the outsider. He questioned Carrese:

"It's a feasible proposition. But how do you work from there? From what I've seen, there are hundreds of these people on the streets. If you start pulling 'em in for questioning, aren't you liable to have trouble with the Church authorities?"

Carrese nodded.

"I have thought of that. It is a matter for consultation with my chief who will then take the matter up with the Cardinal. After that we have lists and identifications prepared by the monasteries and convents. It is not so difficult as it sounds."

Mike Pelletri was impressed. It was at least a beginning. It provided a feasible hypothesis based on the Neapolitan aptitude for theater. He was less happy when he thought how it would look in his next report to the Chief.

But he kept his doubts to himself and asked Carrese:

"Anything I can do in the meantime?"

Carrese grinned, pushed back his chair and stood up.

"Nothing at all, my friend. Leave it to me for a few days. Find yourself a nice girl and take her out to Capri for the sun."

"I'm a married man," said Pelletri, sourly.

"In Naples?" Carrese chuckled, happily. "In Naples it does not apply. Arrivederti, amico. Enjoy yourself."

They parted then. Carrese went back to headquarters to begin his devious negotiations with Church and State, while Mike Pelletri strolled down the noisy swarming thoroughfare of the Via Roma.

It was hot, dusty and shabby, but full of vivid life. Women chattered and gesticulated at the food-stalls, vendors of novelties cried their wares and danced their little toys, street-singers whined and klaxons hooted and the shoe-blacks beat on their boxes calling for trade. Grimy urchins tugged at his coat-tails begging for dollars or cigarettes and bright fish winked at him from glass-bowls strung along a narrow shop-front. Dust rose in little clouds about his feet and the sweat began to seep out of his skin. He stopped a moment to take off his jacket.

A grimy hand thrust a tin cup under his nose and a rasping voice chanted in his ear:

"A gift for the saints, sir. Of your charity, a gift!"

Startled, he looked down to see a grinning dwarf and, beyond him, a pavement artist busy with his chalks on a picture that spread over yards of pavement.

The dwarf danced excitedly and rattled his cup and pointed at the picture.

"Bellissima, non è vero, signore? Beautiful, isn't it? A great artist. Yet he must do this to eat. Look, signore . . . the saints! All the saints of Naples—San Gaetano, Santa Lucia, San Gennaro, Sant'Agata. . . . A small gift, of your charity!"

Pelletri fumbled in his pocket for a handful of change and thrust it into the cup. The dwarf gasped at the generosity of the gift, then caught at his hand and began dragging him along for a closer inspection of the artwork. Pelletri jerked away in disgust and turned off down the Via Roma. A moment later he stopped dead in his tracks.

"Saints on the sidewalk!"

There they were, staring at him, gaudy and improbable—Saint Sebastian with the arrows in his chest, Saint Gennaro carrying the bottle of his own blood, Saint Lucy ecstatic in her virginal martyrdom, Saint Cajetan, the friend of the poor, with his sack of alms on his back.

"Saints on the sidewalk."

But what did they mean? What was their connection with a dead man, and with the Mediterranean drug cartel?

The artist looked up and grinned at him. The dwarf sidled up in the hope of another gift from the crazy fellow in the American clothes. Pelletri stared down at the bright chalks and tried to read their meaning. It was impossible and he knew it. This was a job for Carrese. He turned away and walked swiftly down the Via Roma.

A hundred yards down the thoroughfare, out of sight of the dwarf and the great artist, he turned into a bar, bought a slug from the attendant and dialed the number of Carrese's office. He fumed impatiently at the delaying routines of the Italian switchboards, but finally Carrese came on. His voice was crackling and distant:

"What's the trouble, Mike?"

"No trouble." Pelletri's mouth was pressed against the phone and he spoke swiftly and cautiously. "I've found the saints."

"What?"

"I've found the saints. I can't say any more now. I'm in a bar. How soon can you get here to meet me?"

"Where are you?"

Pelletri looked up, cautiously, reading the reversed letters on the glass pane.

"Fauno Bar . . . up from the Museum on the right hand side. I'll have a beer and wait for you."

"Give me five minutes. I'll be there."

The line went dead and Pelletri turned back to the counter to spend the longest five minutes

of his life over a glass of tepid beer. When Carrese arrived, sweating and excited, they walked outside and stood talking like any pair of Neapolitans in the drowsy noonday sun.

"I don't know what it means," said Pelletri, finally, "but the saints are there on the sidewalk; and I like it better than your idea of checking on all the begging monks in Naples."

"So do I," said Giorgio Carrese, rubbing his dark chin. "So do I."

"Any ideas?"

"Not yet. None that I would wish to talk about. I'd like to see the pictures first."

They made their plans. Pelletri would walk back up the Via Roma on the opposite side of the road. Carrese would stroll past the artist and his tout and pay tribute as Pelletri had done. They would meet in the little park outside the hospital at the top of the Via Roma.

Then they parted and Pelletri waited ten minutes for a break in the traffic before he could cross the Via Roma.

He walked swiftly up the hill and when he came abreast of the artist's pitch he looked across. Carrese was there, staring down at the pictures, while the dwarf stood by rattling his little tin and demanding alms. Pelletri walked on.

When he came to the little park he sat down on a stone bench, lit a cigarette and waited for Carrese. He waited ten minutes, twenty, forty—and at the end of an hour his patience gave out. He ground out his last cigarette and walked angrily down the road.

There was no sign of Carrese. The dwarf and the artist had gone, too, and a couple of urchins were scrawling dirty words over the suffering faces of the saints.

Pelletri went back to his hotel. He telephoned Carrese and was told the "tenente" was out. He cursed proficiently and left a message.

Then he ordered drinks sent to his room and sat down to wait again.

At seven in the evening, there was a knock at his door and Giorgio Carrese came in. Pelletri opened his mouth to shout a protest then closed it again. Carrese's appearance shocked him. The man was gray with fatigue. His eyes were bloodshot, his clothes were crumpled and his twitching fingers were stained with tobacco tar.

"For God's sake man! What's happened to you?"

Carrese gave him a tired grin.

"Your saints were the right ones, Mike. They told me all we want to know. The only difficulty is to prove it. For that I need you."

"But how? What was the meaning of . . . ?"

Carrese cut him short with an impatient gesture.

"How and why, I shall explain later. First I want you to look at this."

He walked over to the divan and spread out a small map of the city of Naples. There were twelve points each marked in red ink with a cross and a circle. Six were in the best quarters of the city, and six in the grim slum areas tourists so seldom saw.

"What do they mean?" Pelletri looked up at the drawn, stubbly face of his colleague.

"According to your saints, each one of these crosses represents the apartment of a receiver and exporter of narcotics. Those in the better quarters are Americans who have been staying in Naples on visitors' permits. The other six are emigrants booked to depart for the United States. All are registered on the passenger list of the 'Lucania' which sails from Naples in forty-eight hours."

Pelletri gave a low whistle of surprise.

"How did you find all that?"

Carrese shrugged, wearily.

"The saints told me part of it. The rest I had to get for myself. I have been racing from point to point and making telephone calls all the afternoon. That is why I am so late and why I have not contacted you before."

"What's the next move? Arrest?"

Carrese spread his hands in a gesture of despair.

"If it were my move, yes. Unfortunately, it is not. The Director refuses to authorize any proceedings until I have proof. I cannot get proof unless I commit an illegal act involving American citizens . . . for which, of course, the Director will take no responsibility. I am being thrown to the lions. I—I am asking you to step into the arena with me."

"What do you want me to do?"

Carrese pointed to one of the small inked crosses on the map.

"This is the apartment of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Anderson, American citizens. I want to enter it and search their baggage."

"Why not start with the Italians who are under your own jurisdiction?"

"Because," said Carrese, simply, "once I do that the game is finished. Rumor runs like wildfire in the crowded streets of the city. We should catch one fish and all the rest would swim out through holes in the net."

Mike Pelletri chewed on the proposition. The taste of it did not please him. If Carrese's guess were wrong, both of them

would be mauled by the lions and their careers would be finished. The Treasury might forget a failure, they would never forgive a political scandal.

"Well, Mike?"

Carrese looked at him with anxious eyes.

"Let's go," said Pelletri, crisply.

"Tu sei un proprio amico," said Carrese, softly. "You're a real friend."

Ten minutes later they were walking up the staircase of a fashionable apartment block on the Via Santa Lucia. On the second landing, Carrese stopped and pointed to a door. The card under the bell-push said Mr. & Mrs. Charles Anderson.

"This is the place."

Pelletri pressed the bell. They heard murmurs and muffled movements and then the door was opened by a tall, blond fellow with a crew-cut and puzzled, hostile eyes.

"Something you wanted?" He spoke in a flat mid-western drawl.

"Mr. Charles Anderson?" It was Pelletri who spoke.

"That's right."

"I'd like to talk to you."

"About what?"

Anderson's big frame blocked the doorway. He had his rights and his rights forbade entry and search without warrant. So far as he was concerned, all the talking would be done outside the apartment.

Pelletri's fist drove into his middle and as he sagged forward, Pelletri's shoulder caught him in the mouth. He lurched backward and the two agents thrust after him into the apartment. Carrese slammed the door behind him.

Then the blond fellow came up swinging. Pelletri feinted and slammed him backward into the crowded lounge, and when he stood rocking against the table, Carrese faced him with a small, black Brietta.

"For God's sake! What's going on?"

It was a woman's voice, high and strained, and Pelletri turned to see her standing in the doorway that led to the bedroom, a small, dark, compact girl with her long hair tied back in a horse-tail and her high-breasted figure encased in a black negligee.

"She doesn't scream, you notice," said Carrese in swift Italian. "She makes a dramatic surprise, but she keeps her voice down."

"I've noticed," said Pelletri, in the same tongue. Then, in English, "Over here, sweetheart, and join your husband."

As the girl moved cautiously across the room to join him, Anderson found his voice again.

He spoke thickly through bruised and broken lips.

"I don't know who you are or what you want, but you'll . . ."

"Where is it?" asked Mike Pelletri, gently.

"Where's what?"

"The consignment."

Anderson's eyes were blank, his muscles steady.

But the girl gave a start of surprise and looked swiftly at her husband.

"I don't know who you are or what you're talking about. If you're looking for something, go find it. But be careful of my equipment. It's my living."

Then Pelletri saw that the lounge and the bedroom were littered with clothes and shoes and open grips—the normal disarray of tourists making ready to pull out. He saw two cameras, expensive professional models, a tripod, carrying case, and in the center of the table a small stack of materials for developing and printing.

Anderson's eyes followed him.

"Go on, for Pete's sake! Look for whatever it is you expect to find—then get out!"

"So, you're a photographer?"

"That's right."

"What paper?"

"Free-lance. I work for the syndicates. Who the hell are you?"

"Treasury agent," said Pelletri, blandly. "I work against the syndicates."

He picked up a large bottle of white crystalline powder labeled 'Fine-grain Developer, formula one.' It was new and unopened, but when his fingers pressed against the seal, the wax was soft and tacky. He grinned and looked up at Anderson.

"Where did you buy this?"

"In the States. It's the last of my stock. You can't get the good stuff here. I had to bring my own. I declared it coming out. I'll declare it going in."

"Careful fellow," said Pelletri, smoothly. "But not careful enough. The makers use plastic seals. This is sealing wax. Your developer is processed heroin."

Then the girl screamed and Anderson leapt and Carrese's shot caught him in the shoulder and sent him spinning back against the wall. Carrese handed the gun to Mike Pelletri and reached for the telephone. After a pause he said, briskly.

"This is Lieutenant Carrese. Give me the Director—subito!"

Later, at three in the morning, they sat in a waterside restaurant with wine in front of them and music in their ears and Carrese gave him the answer to the riddle of the saints on the sidewalk.

"When first I saw the saints, Mike, I knew that you were

right. Like you, I was at a loss to understand their meaning. Then I saw something strange. There are a hundred pavement artists in Naples, but they all have one thing in common. They like 'bravura'—the big style—the crowded picture with lots of cherubs and saints to frame the principal subject. This one was different. He had cut up his picture into careful little squares and filled each one with a separate subject—a frame for each saint. It was unusual, out of character as you say. I asked myself why. I counted the frames . . . four across, three down. Twelve in all. That gave each picture a number. It was still not enough. I looked again at the pictures. All the saints were clearly shown, each with his own symbol. But as I watched, the artist began to do more—under each one he began to write the name of the subject . . . Santa Lucia, San Gennaro. . . . This again was out of character, since it is part of the device of these fellows to make you curious. You ask what the picture represents. The answer costs you money. You see?"

Pelletri nodded. He saw very well.

He saw something else, too, a shrewd and subtle young investigator working with his own brain, unaided by filing systems and teleprinters and all the mechanics of modern criminology. Carrese went on:

"The next step was the hardest of all. I had twelve names and twelve numbers. Santa Lucia was number one. San Gaetano was number twelve, the last of all."

"And so . . . ?"

"And so, my friend," said Giorgio Carrese, "I stood like a fool until a tourist stopped me and asked me how to get to Santa Lucia. Then I remembered that many of our streets have Saint's names—so that the saints on the sidewalk were street-names and the numbers were the numbers of apartments. I checked the list of residents in each apartment and found the common factors—American tourists and Italian emigrants. When our first guess was proved right . . . from there it was easy. I telephoned headquarters for a search of each apartment. Tomorrow we pick up the artist and his dwarf—if their own people have not dealt with them already. Result to date—ten arrests and thirty kilos of uncut heroin."

"Nice work, "said Mike Pelletri. He raised his glass and gave the toast in the tongue which had once been his own. "Al genio d'Italia—to the Italian genius."

"Al nostri alleati Americani," said Georgio Carrese. "To our American allies."

They drank—deeply.

# cover her face

*by . . . Ruthven Todd*

**Oh yes, perhaps the girl liked being alive also, but that was so different. She didn't really know what it was to be alive!**

So YOU think I'll make a good figure in one of your stories, do you? Well, let me tell you straight, I won't. You'll never get it across. *You* could never know what this place feels like and if you did, you'd never be able to write it down. Oh, I know they do their best to make it comfortable, but—think, man, think—only tomorrow morning they'll wake me early—if I have slept at all.

Yes, they'll give me my choice for breakfast. Civilized of them, isn't it? I guess I'll have kidneys and bacon, and I'll wash them down with a pint of beer. I always was a great one for my beer. Do you remember Kipling, the old Blimp?

I haven't read him since I left school, but for days it's been running in my head. I can't get it quite right. "He's drinking bitter beer today, but he's drinking it alone." It comes from a poem called *Danny Deever*.

Oh, so that's the way it goes, does it? Thanks. You've helped put that one out of my mind.

There are four paces this way and three, that. Have you ever

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lived in a room like this? Perhaps, eh? Yes, maybe, but *you* could go out for a walk when the walls started pressing in your head. *I* can't get out. They take me round the yard, but that's worse than useless.

It's only a short walk, they tell me, and a short flight of steps. They think this'll comfort me. But it'll be the last walk I'll ever take—forever and ever.

Well, what was it you wanted of me? What did you want to know? Of course, you're my cousin and that's why they let you in. Ghoulish, though, I call it, making copy out of my misfortunes. You just wanted to hear me speak, eh? Well, you've heard me speak. Why don't you go away?

I don't know why I did it myself—so *I* can't tell you. Eleven and a half hours from now— Oh, don't go— I don't mind talking. It'll take up some of the time and stop me thinking. Have you ever *heard* time walking past? It goes slowly—there's all eternity between each footstep—but you count them up and before you know it another hour has gone forever. One hour nearer the end—and I like being alive.

Oh, yes, I know you'll say she liked being alive, too. But that was different. She hadn't got my appreciation of life. She really didn't know *what* it was to be alive.

Listen, man! Can't you hear time roaring past? Oh, it's just my pulse that's beating in my ears, is it? But that's time too—that's one pulse-beat I'll never hear again. No, I don't think I'll crack up. I'll walk these last few steps just as if I was going to the corner for a packet of cigarettes. But don't go away—please! Just having you here is something—if not much.

It only goes to show that it's a mistake to go after a girl beneath you. She lacked the finer sensibilities which I myself have. Of course, she *was* pretty—if you like that kind of prettiness. I used to think I liked it myself, until I found out there was more to life than a pretty face and a fine figure.

It's odd, isn't it, to think I'm going to die because of someone who was so completely trivial. It isn't what you might call a death in the grand manner. They'll take me out of this cell and they'll hang me by the neck until I'm dead—dead—dead! Dead—just like any little vulgarian who had killed his girl. What a waste of all my gifts—gifts that might have been so useful to humanity.

You know I was clever. You see—I'm already talking of myself in the past tense? I *am* clever. I got through all my exams with flying colors. They said I'd a brilliant future. There was nothing I might not have

done. And now this—all because of someone so utterly unimportant.

I was drunk when I met her. I'd gone to the Palais with a lot of chaps from the University. She looked so gay as she danced that I thought it would be fun to take her away from the clod who was her companion. Of course, I can now see that she was in her proper element. You know—water finding its own level and so on.

It wasn't difficult. I danced with her once or twice and then suggested we go for a drink. She said the pubs were shut, but I pointed out that I'd got some liquor in my flat. I can still remember the way she looked at me. Her big brown eyes were excited. It was a big adventure for her to go to a man's flat for a drink. Poor little thing.

To my offer of brandy, she said she'd rather have gin. I should have been warned then. Anyone who would prefer gin to brandy was obviously lacking in these points of sensibility which would make for a happy relationship with a man like me.

Yes, she was pretty, and even through the bad lines of her cheap frock I could see she'd a decent figure. It's funny how Kipling keeps coming back to me. Somewhere he refers to a woman who "looked like Old Greece and talked like the Old Kent Road." That just fits René.

Of course, I knew all along that wasn't her right name. She'd been christened plain Agnes, and her parents, of course, called her Aggie. I don't blame her for changing it, but she showed her lack of taste in the name she chose, and of education in the way she spelled it.

I don't like rushing things, so I didn't try anything that night. She told me afterwards she found this attractive in me. When I think of the clumsy pawing of clods, I shudder. And yet, that was what she'd been brought up to, and what she'd expected. She called me a gentleman and, though I'm no snob, I can't but say she was right. For me a gentleman is one who realizes that there's a time and a place for everything. I knew that evening was not the time.

Looking back on it now—God! how the time goes by—I can see that her little efforts at gentility fascinated me. I liked the silly way she lengthened her "a" and sometimes gave it a flavor of "e." Living at Davidson's Mains, I'd never met any girls but those in my own walk of life. You know the kind? Friendly, and honest, and terribly good at tennis or hockey. About as exciting as boiled puddings.

René was exciting. She walked as if she was alive, and not as if she was worrying about the respectability of her figure. There

was none of that feeling of armor-plating I got when I danced with these honest burghers' daughters. You know what I mean? Your fingers counting the vertical ridges of whalebone or whatnot, or silk-sheathed rubber, instead of the nice hard knobs of the spine.

These girls were so afraid of the fact that they'd got figures that they hid them behind walls. You might almost say that the corset and the girdle were the modern chastity-belts, eh?

I'm glad you came, old man. You see I've just made a joke, and I haven't felt like doing that in a long time. Not a very good joke, perhaps, but still a joke.

René was plump where she was meant to be plump, and slim too in the right places. She didn't need a girdle to give her a hard, flat little belly.

Before she left that night, I'd found out where she lived and what she did. She worked in a shop at Tollcross, and lived with her people near Haymarket.

I made a date to meet her the next night. Even then I had the feeling she didn't quite belong, because, instead of asking her to meet me at the Café Royal or the Three Tuns, where the rest of the fellows went, I suggested Hughie's, in Rose Street—tough, you know, and free from my own crowd.

Of course, she was late. I drank a couple of pints waiting for her. I even looked at my watch several times. That wasn't like me. I'm usually capable of controlling my feelings. I don't believe in displaying my emotions. I told myself that she'd thought of her inferiority, and had decided she was not the sort of person for a chap like me.

All the same, I must give myself *some* credit. Thinking it over, I'm sure I chose Hughie's because it was the sort of place where she'd feel at home. Perhaps I'm doing myself less than justice when I talk to you? All the same, old man, it is good to have someone to speak to—it passes the *time*.

When she came into the bar, perky as a bird, turning her head this way and that, my heart bumped inside me. Of course, physiologically that's a misstatement, but you know what I mean? There was that feeling of a lump in my throat which I felt again when the judge put on that silly little square of silk. I'm sure I don't know why they call it a black cap. It's just a scrap of black silk.

I was flattered to notice she'd had her hair done. I suppose she'd felt her inferiority beside me, and felt that her dress from the Guinea Shop didn't quite go with my suit from Anderson & Sheppard. She'd felt she had to make an effort. So, as she couldn't afford more, she'd gone

to one of those cheap hairdressers near Tollcross and had spent her few shillings on having her hair fluffed up.

When I rose to greet her, I got the impression that she wasn't used to having chaps rise for her. It seemed that, just by accident of my breeding, I was going the right way about impressing her. It's funny the way things work out, isn't it? Here I was, more or less slumming, just for the fun of it, and look where it's landed me!

All along I knew there was no future in it. I did my best to teach her to pronounce her words correctly, but when she got excited that dreadful Morningside accent crept out and grated on my ear.

I could, though, forgive her a lot for the sake of her face and her body. These were perfect. God! if she'd only had the mind to go with them, it might have worked!

But her mind was as empty as a blown eggshell. She'd filled it with bits from the movies and pieces from her favorite papers —*Pug's Paper, Red Letter* and so on. Her conversation was of "boys"—I, just imagine it, was her "boy"! And, when she forgot, she called me a "gent"—just as if I had to do with the natural functions of the body.

Yes, I suppose she *did* love me, in her shallow way. But what do we know of the feelings of those impulses and actions that are motivated by pure instinct? I flattered her pretty, petty little ego. I was a capture beyond her dreams. Soon I'd be a qualified doctor, and she'd be my wife. It was a true story from her pitiful reading—millgirl to duchess, eh?

You know how it is? A person of my sensitivity can always sense the dreams and motives of those he comes across. She was already seeing herself as "the doctor's wife," sitting in a drawing-room with etchings by D. Y. Cameron and Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* from the Medici Society, pouring out tea, drinking it with the little finger nicely crooked, and speaking in refined accents of her husband—"The Doctor."

Oh, yes, I knew her dreams. But I was brilliant and I could not see her as my wife, or as the lady to my knighthood. She would never have learned all the common decencies of life. She would never have shed all those little tricks which grated. Can you blame me?

In my mind, I can still dwell on the one visit I paid her parents. The only one—thank God! A four-roomed cottage, tumbledown and cramped, with a never-used parlor. You know the kind of place? I was given tea in the parlor, among the photographs of old football teams and the dusty castor-oil plants. You might say they were

honest and simple working-people. I could not envisage them as my parents-in-law. I'll admit, however, that I preferred their Edinburgh accents to René's version of Murrayfield or Morningside.

Still, I *was* the victim of her fascination, of her simple pride in her body and face. It lasted a long time, but I always knew it couldn't go on forever. These things don't.

Yes, she *was* generous with herself, and in her naiveté she thought I was equally generous and meant everything I said to her. I daresay that, in the heat of the bed, I did promise her marriage. God! it's strange to think of it now, with the time running out like this.

Oh, if she'd been a little more sensitive and a little more receptive, I might even have risked it. But, the way things were, I couldn't gum up my career at the very start by marrying René. She'd have been a burden which even I couldn't have carried.

It was then I met Caroline. Yes, she's everything that I've always disliked about the Edinburgh girl. But her father's a brilliant surgeon. It wouldn't have been at all bad to be a rising young man with Sir John Bowditch as my father-in-law. I saw it all so clearly. I may flatter myself that I have a gift for seeing things clearly.

Besides, though I may be harsh about Caroline now, there was always the point that she was my own kind. She knew the people I knew, *and* she spoke the same kind of language. Oh, God, yes, I'd have got tired of her in a month or two, but the marriage would have gone on. I'd have established myself as one of the most brilliant of the younger men. Also, if I was careful, I was sure I would be able to find compensations for my family life. I don't think Caroline would ever have been suspicious of me. She'd have taken my exemplary behavior for granted—or, at least, would have expected me to be discreet.

I saw quite clearly, too, that I'd have to drop René. That was the trouble. She wouldn't be *dropped*. I suppose she saw her dreams fading, and was fighting for them. I tried to avoid seeing her, but she took to accosting me in the street. It really was *too* embarrassing.

I realized that the continued importunities might endanger my future, and I knew there'd have to be a show-down.

I want you to understand that I'd no thoughts of killing her. When I asked her to come round to my flat that Saturday afternoon, I merely wanted to tell her that it was all over between us. Of course, I'll admit I was a moral coward. I should've done it before. But you know how things are? I saw I'd have to get

it over, whether I liked it or not.

There was something about the way she looked at me. So trusting. It made me feel crueler than I was. I told myself I was doing her a kindness. She'd never have fitted into my circle. Her shallow little mind could never have grasped the complexities of mine. Oh, I don't suppose Caroline would have got them either, but *she'd* have been content to be my wife without trying to intrude on my ideas.

I began gently. I was prepared for tears and, perhaps, even for some hysteria. I wasn't prepared for the transformation of the gentle René into a virago. She stormed at me and as she did so I was interested to notice that she shed the affectations of her speech and lapsed into her native Scots. Listening to her rage, I told myself I was well out of it.

I let her finish and got up to pour myself a drink. I measured a good four fingers of whiskey into the glass and took up the soda-siphon.

Then she spoke, quite softly, "David, you'll *have* to marry me. I'm going to have a baby."

I saw it. I was trapped. My brilliance would count for nothing tied to this vulgar little baggage. And I'd be tied for life. I knew it would be no use suggesting that anything could be done about it. She'd never have agreed. Although René wasn't a Catholic herself, her parents were and she'd imbibed enough of the doctrine to make *that* impossible.

Oh, yes, she'd got me neatly by the short hairs. I don't know why I did it, but in a sudden flush of rage—like a beast cornered—I swung the siphon at her. I don't think I meant to hit her with it, but she moved toward me just at that moment. Her lips were parted as though in readiness for a kiss, as though what she had said had made everything all right between us once more.

I felt rather than saw the heavy glass crash against the side of her head.

Then I was suddenly cool again. She lay crumpled on the floor. I bent down over her and realized she was dead. There was nothing I could do about it.

For about half an hour I walked up and down the room—just as these last weeks I've been walking up and down this cell. I thought I might explain it as an accident—for, damn it all, it was that and nothing more. I hadn't meant to kill her. I might have got away with that. She *could* have hit her head on the cast-iron fender.

But then I realized how that would involve me. I'd need to think of a way out which wouldn't blacken me in the eyes of Caroline's people. Sir John is an awful old stuffed shirt. You'd never dream he'd ever

been young himself. No, it was clear I couldn't call the police and say there'd been an accident.

There was only one way out for me. That was to cut her up and dispose of the body. It was fortunate, I told myself, that I was such a brilliant hand at dissection. I took a piece of oil-cloth and laid it on the table in the kitchen. I bent to pick her up. She wasn't heavy.

The siphon hadn't damaged her looks at all. She was still lovely. I laid a handkerchief over her face. I don't know what it was, but I couldn't bear to look at her. Do you remember from school—"Cover her face, mine eyes dazzle, she died young"? Yes? Well, I suppose it was something like that.

I don't suppose you want to hear about the next hours? I don't much like remembering them myself. The knife exploring where the loving hands had been. I was steady, though, and I made an excellent job of it.

There was, however, one point where I nearly lost control of myself. That was when I discovered she'd lied to me about her condition. But even that didn't make me wish to mar her face. Somehow I couldn't do it.

You know—everyone knows—how I strewed the minute particles of flesh and bone about The Meadows. It might have seemed a stupid move, but I'd often watched the dogs rioting about there, and I knew that, cut sufficiently small, these fragments would soon disappear. The trouble was her head.

When I'd finished my work I think I was pretty drunk. At any rate the whiskey bottle was empty and I was more than half-way through the brandy. I took them neat, for somehow I just couldn't use the soda-siphon.

You know the way things go? I was not alarmed when a policeman came to my flat one evening to ask if I'd seen her. I avoided the common error of saying I thought she'd gone off with another man. I don't say I didn't think of that, but I realized it might involve me. It might suggest that I'd been intimate with her. I managed to get it across that, while I'd certainly been friendly with the girl, I knew nothing of her love-life. That policeman went away satisfied.

What I hadn't counted on was her girl-friend in the shop where she'd worked. If I'd had any sense I'd have realized she couldn't keep a *romance,* as she'd have called it, like hers a secret. It was too like the stories in her pathetic papers. I'd represented her possibility of escape from trivial drudgery and her rise in the social scale.

The next time they came there were two of them. A constable and a fellow in plain-clothes. They were polite. I will say *that* for them. But the man

in plain-clothes said, "I don't suppose you mind if we take a look round?" And, of course, I couldn't refuse.

All the time I was in Sauchiehall Prison, waiting for the trial, Caroline never came near me once. I felt annoyed by this. It showed a sad lack of trust in me. I never anticipated any trouble. Of course, I knew I shouldn't have cut up her body and disposed of it the way I'd done. But, then, a chap in my position couldn't afford to be mixed up in a thing like that. Of course, too, it was different now. The whole story would have to come out. I supposed that having a trial was just a formality.

It was so patently absurd to suppose that a man of my attainments would actually have murdered a shop-girl. To my surprise, I found that my lawyer didn't think it was as simple as I did. That's one of the troubles about living in a place like Edinburgh. All these old family lawyers are more dead than alive. Of course, they're all right on matters of property and so on—but they know nothing of the real facts of life.

The court was crowded. Looking along the public benches I saw many of my friends. You were there, too, weren't you? I thought I saw you. I also saw René's parents. They looked old and shrunken. It was absurd that they should've been so upset over the death of such an unimportant person.

I realized quickly that I was the only person in court who had any real philosophical grasp of the meaning of civilization. Here I was, a potential benefactor of humanity, suffering the indignity of being tried for my life—*for my life,* mind you—all because of the death of one who had nothing to give to the people among whom she lived.

Nonsense, old boy, nonsense. That's rubbish. Beauty is an accident and the world could get along nicely without beautiful women. "Beauty is but a flower which wrinkles will devour." It couldn't get along without doctors.

My lawyer didn't want me to go into the witness-box. I had to insist. His account of what had happened was so garbled I felt I had to get it straight, in justice—that's a funny word—to myself. After all, I'd been there myself and I alone knew just what had happened.

I pointed out, rightly, that René was a person of no importance. It only goes to show that crass sentimentality is not quite dead. When I spoke some people on the public-benches hissed. I'm glad to say the judge made short work of them. He told them, more or less, to shut up or get out. I suffered no further interruptions.

One of the advantages of a training like mine is that you learn to tell a story briefly, without inessentials.

Of course, the other side did their best to blacken my character. They said I'd been trifling with the girl's affections and that I'd seen a personal advantage in a marriage with Caroline. This was nonsense. I was going to marry Caroline because she was the same kind of person as myself, with the same background. I'd sufficient faith in my own abilities to know that I didn't need to be helped to success. Then, too, they tried to make capital out of the way in which I'd disposed of the body. A set of sentimental slobs, they could not realize that my actions had been entirely logical.

The judge was a little man with a little dried-up face. He shuffled his notes slowly before he spoke to the jury. He reminded them that there were three verdicts in Scotland—Guilty, Not Guilty and Not Proven. He made some remarks about the jury's not being influenced by any personal distaste for the prisoner. I supposed he meant well, but I couldn't for the life of me see why he said it, unless he was trying to protect a man of his own level of intelligence against the malignancy of the unlettered mob.

I had little doubt about the verdict. They might not go all the way to saying I wasn't guilty, but I blessed my lucky stars that the trial was in Scotland, with that providential third verdict. Of course, I myself knew I wasn't guilty, but I couldn't vouch for what was going on in the minds of a lot of small tradesmen.

I may say that when the jury came back after only ten minutes and said I was guilty I nearly laughed. I thought the judge would send them back to reconsider their verdict, but he just nodded his little bird-like head.

I scarcely heard what he said to me. He said something about agreeing with the jury which showed me I'd been wrong in my estimate of him. He was a man utterly lacking in the finer points of sensibility. You might have expected a man in his position to realize that an educated man like myself could not set about murdering a shop-girl, for that was all she was. He asked me if I'd anything to say before he pronounced sentence.

I certainly had. I pointed out that the trial had been badly mismanaged and that it was ridiculous to think of punishing a man of my gifts—gifts of incomparable value to humanity—just because he had failed to make the true story acceptable to a bunch of clods. I indicated the jury. Further, I thought it was my duty to point out that the world was no poorer for

René's death, whereas it would be a great deal poorer for mine. I thought I made the position clear.

Then he put on that silly little bit of black silk and, playing with a little nosegay of herbs, told me I would be hanged by the neck until I was dead. It was so farcical I could scarcely believe it myself.

However, I had little doubt that a higher court would see there'd been a gross miscarriage of justice, so I didn't worry. It's all so obviously absurd. The law is corrupt. My appeal was rejected and they tell me now there's no hope of a reprieve.

In a little more than ten hours the chaplain will come in and ask me to say my prayers. Why should I pray? It won't do *me* any good. Then they'll tie my hands behind my back and I'll go for that short walk. I don't think I'll break down. I still can't quite believe it's me in this cell. No—I mustn't think of it.

Thanks for coming, old fellow. You can make what use you like of what I've told you. You will make it clear that I'm suffering unjustly, won't you? It's destroyed all my faith in the infallibility of British justice. It's a travesty, that's what it is!

The whole situation is too ridiculous for words. If I'd been a little less sensitive than I am, I wouldn't be here now. They could never have proved it against me. It was all circumstantial evidence but for that one thing. I just couldn't bring myself to cut it up, so there it was in the kitchen cupboard—René's head in a jar of formalin.

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## THE ATTEMPT TO ASSASSINATE WASHINGTON

ONE EVENING, in the early summer of 1776, three men met in a tavern in New York to plan Washington's assassination. A group of Tories was to seize control of the city gates and admit the British during the confusion expected while the General was dying.

One of the conspirators, a member of Washington's lifeguards named Thomas Hickey, knew Washington was very fond of green peas. His job was to mix some poison in the General's dish of peas. Fortunately he couldn't resist talking. He told the General's housekeeper about it, and she promptly reported the conversation to the authorities.

So on the day the poisoned peas were served to Washington, the General casually put them to one side—he didn't feel like peas at the moment. Once he was through, the peas were fed to some hens who died immediately. Thomas Hickey and his associates were arrested and Hickey, after conviction by a court martial, was hung at the present intersection of Delancey Street and the Bowery.

# THE saint's RATINGS

## *Whaddaya expect for two bits?*

*Well, frankly, when it comes to reading matter, we expect quite a lot. Page for page, or pound for pound, a brand-new paperback, such as we are reviewing, is no cheaper than the pocket reprint of a classic, or last year's best-seller, which we'd somehow missed. At comparable prices, we expect comparable quality. This month, our reviewer didn't find anything first-class.*

OUR RATING SYSTEM:

- Three haloes: Outstanding
- Two haloes: Above average
- One halo: Passable reading
- A pitchfork: For the ashcan

**TROUBLE IS MY NAME, by Stephen Marlowe (Gold Medal, 25¢)**

Billed in the blurb as the super-tough private eye of all time, Chester Drum falls far short of the build-up—to the great advantage of the book. Interesting settings in East and West Germany.

**YOU'LL GET YOURS, by Thomas Wills (Lion, 25¢)**

Somewhat conventional P I opening manages to work up to a couple of unstereotyped twists. Easy light-weight reading.

**MURDER IN MONACO, by John Flagg (Gold Medal, 25¢)**

Should rate some award for featuring perhaps the most ineffectual investigator in current literature, who detects absolutely nothing until a convenient confession at the end lays it all in his lap. But has some entertaining characters.

**DIG MY GRAVE DEEP, by Peter Rabe (Gold Medal, 25¢)**

Unusual background of crooked political machine at the ward-heeling level is handled so turgidly that you might give up in the first chapters, but enough comes through in the end to save this one—narrowly—from a pitchfork.

**A HELL OF A WOMAN, by Jim Thompson (Lion, 25¢)**

"Jim Thompson is the finest crime novelist going, Simenon and Graham Greene notwithstanding," says somebody called George Milburn on the cover. We don't know if Milburn is a pseudonym for Thompson, or vice versa, but we feel reasonably sure no other reader on earth, outside his immediate family, will agree.

**HOT, by Frederick Lorenz (Lion, 25¢)**

It's not.

# crooked play

*by . . . Arthur Somers Roche*

**Deauville was a paradise in those days for the gamblers —and others—who preyed on the wealthy and the gullible.**

CULLINEY was playing it safe. He had been holding his place at the chemin de fer table by hazarding an occasional hundred franc chip, but the play was high, and someone called "banco" nearly every time, so that his bet was cancelled. Now the dealer at his left had lost, and the privilege of banking automatically passed to Culliney.

The bank had lost six bets out of the last nine, so there were two ways to figure the situation; one was that the bank's ill-luck would continue a while longer; the other was that the luck was ready to turn.

Culliney, usually cool and cautious, was not the kind to bet against the table, as gamblers phrase it. If black came at roulette, he was never stubborn enough to bet against the table.

But coolness and caution desert most men, even professional gamblers like Ward Culliney, when the bankroll is emaciated from lack of nourishment. He had come into the casino with

*It has been said that Arthur Somers Roche, well known to* Cosmopolitan *and* Collier's *readers of the last generation, in reporting on the frailties —sophisticated or otherwise—of his times, was very much a chronicler of the* mores *of the fabulous twenties, blending a very modern realism, as is seen here, with the adventurous romanticism popular at the time.*



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his last five thousand francs, and, despite all his caution, the roll had dwindled to a pitiful two thousand, approximately one hundred dollars in American money.

There was no loving father back in New York City who would cable replenishment to the dwindled Culliney fortunes; there were no bankers who would honor an overdraft, no firms of respectable attorneys who, despite grim smiles, would advance any required sum to a valued client.

Maybe, at Saratoga or French Lick or even, during this month of August, in New York City itself were men who would be glad to send Ward Culliney get-away money.

But one could never be sure; his pals might be as flat broke as himself; even trimming suckers fails of profit if the ponds go dry; and about every sucker worth a real man's while was in Europe just now.

Yes, he was absolutely on his own. And busted! He, Ward Culliney, who had boarded a liner to avoid offending his ears with the squawking of a fleeced lamb, and who had thought to himself that the hunting at Deauville would be superb, who had believed that he, the most agile-fingered card sharp in America, would find it easy to beat the French boobs, was removed from the hard ground only by the thickness of a pair of leather soles.

Not so excellent, friends! Playing chemin de fer at a public table was not quite the same thing as using a fixed box to deal the cards. These French dealers had eyes like hawks. Moreover, the French detectives were competent.

One of them had tapped Culliney on the shoulder the day he landed in Deauville. Politely, of course.

It was of a pleasure to greet M'sieu; it would be of a desolation most terrible to say au revoir to M'sieu, but—what would you? M. Culliney was of a prominence; but naturally the Casino authorities knew all about so eminent a gentleman; and, while the Casino welcomed him, the Casino desired, least of anything in the world, that M. Culliney's brave compatriots, the so-gallant Americans, should spread the tidings that the Casino did not protect the purses of the Casino's guests from any attack save that of the Casino itself.

"You want all the boobs kept private, eh?" said Culliney bitterly. "No outside pickings at all, eh?"

Of a so-quick comprehension was M. Culliney; it was to be prayed that he was not offended; after all, *les affairs sont les affaires.*

"Sure, business is business," assented Mr. Culliney. "Well,

I'll just walk along the bank and never toss a hook overboard."

Now, had Culliney, on his arrival at Deauville, been illy supplied with American Express checks, he would have returned at once to America, and braved the still echoing squawks that had driven him across the ocean. But he had, as he phrased it, plenty dough, and Deauville was a cheery dump. Races and golf and bathing and pretty girls and—gambling.

For Ward Culliney, trickster par excellence, who could operate a crooked wheel or sand a faro dick, had confidence in his mental skill, and when deprived of opportunity to exercise his digital facility, would back his brains and luck against the brains and luck of anyone alive.

And he had lost in the neighborhood of thirty thousand hard-gained dollars. These South Americans would certainly bet 'em, and when an Englishman felt like plunging his shoes were the last things to get wet; an Englishman would dive right in without asking how deep the water was.

The mille notes, each worth about fifty dollars, had been peeled off Ward Culliney so fast that, as he mused in his thoughts, he was chilled before he realized the blankets were gone.

Yet, while one had a bet on the table, one was a potential millionaire. The question was: should he remove the bet or let it lay? He shrugged the wide shoulders that had won the endorsement of second glances from many a chic Parisienne during his stay at Deauville. Into his hard blue eyes—slightly filmed as are the eyes of most of his sort—came a gleam of desperation. When a man started to figure *luck,* to estimate it, that man was a blithering jackass.

Pass the bank or put up his dough; one or the other and be quick about it. So Culliney tossed two placques on the table; the man at his right said banco; Culliney dealt the cards; his opponent showed an eight, and Ward Culliney smilingly rose and left the table.

Many a feminine eye followed him as he weaved in and out of the heterogeneous, cosmopolitan crowd that thronged the rooms. For not only had Culliney wide shoulders and the body of an athlete in condition, he had the bird-of-prey countenance that attracts women.

His not too aquiline nose, the chin that was slightly cleft, the thin lips that could smile and sneer in almost the same movement, the smooth black hair, and the reckless air of him: these found instant favor in the eyes of the ladies. That he was, quite obviously, not exactly of the polite world, made little difference. Women who would have refused

to permit him to be presented, nevertheless favored him with a passing thought.

Culliney looked the lover; not the kindly chivalrous lover, but the cynical lover who, appraising gifts, would toss them back in contempt. And yet he was a bit of an ascetic. He could outthink men, he assured himself, but a woman was something else again. When a woman ought to laugh, she squawked; when she ought to squawk, she came through with a grin. Benny Leonard to knock out Dempsey; Bernard Shaw to become president of a bank; Secretary Hughes to enter the movies: these were swell bets compared to doping out what a woman would do on any occasion, under any circumstance, before any compulsion.

Here and there men nodded to him, put themselves in his way, forced him to stop and exchange words with them. For men accorded him liking as readily as women accorded him something more. Before he had managed to push his way to the check-room where reposed his hat and stick, he had declined five invitations for the morrow. Chance acquaintances, these, who did not realize that the police at home bent wary eyes on Ward Culliney. To them, these sojourners aboard, Ward Culliney was an extremely attractive young man whose very reticence about himself seemed to indicate that he was somebody. And the female companions of the gentlemen were depressed because of his refusals.

But not half so depressed as Culliney. Back in his rooms at the Normandie, he stared out at the ocean, shimmering coldly under the moon. He shuddered slightly; the world seemed like the sea tonight; bright but inhospitable, beautiful but indifferent.

They said the French jails were simply terrible, and that the French detectives were the best in the world. Not so good. . . . And damn that shining ocean, which seemed alive, inviting a chap to wade out and in. . . . This was sap stuff, he'd been sunk before and had emerged weighted with jewels. As he lay in bed he recounted to himself the times he had been broke, forlorn, hopeless, and reassured himself by remembrance of how somebody had always come along in the nick of time and offered himself for the shearing.

But it wouldn't work, this philosophical reliance upon past performance. It simply wouldn't bring sleep to his restless pillow. For those other occasions had been back home in the good old U. S. A. This was in France, with foreign speech and customs and everything conspiring to hamper an artist in his work.

Sleep did, of course, finally

come, but it was a troubled slumber, and when awakened in the morning, he was unrefreshed, blue, miserable, afraid. This last was the ominous thing; he was afraid. And a confidence man must have confidence; if he lacked that, he is as a shoemaker without leather, a sculptor without marble, a poker player without cards.

But—one must eat. So he pressed the button which summoned the waiter, and ordered breakfast. Then he climbed into the tub and buried his face repeatedly in the cold water. This, and the shave that followed, freshened him slightly, and when, attired in a dressing-gown that had won the respect of the valet-de-chambre, he seated himself before his morning meal, he was able even to find a certain relish in the French coffee. And a man who can enjoy French coffee may be down, but he is certainly not out.

Like all gamblers, he was a lavish tipper, but this alone did not account for the eagerness to please of the waiter who attended him. Not quite a gentleman, the waiter would have told you, but one destined to make a mark, whether black or white, what matter! As for the femme de chambre, who brought him his laundry, she thought him magnificent, and she was maternally cross because of his carelessness in money matters.

"But look, M'sieu," she exclaimed. She held up two five hundred franc notes. She shook her black head reproachfully. "To let so much money become entangled in a handkerchief! But for the goodness of the laundress and my own honesty, where would M'sieu be?"

Culliney chucked her under the chin. He was one of the few men, outside of historical romances, who could do that sort of thing.

"Marie, you're a grand girl," he told her. Inwardly he sighed, but outwardly he was the debonair gentleman whom Marie knew. *Noblesse oblige!* It mattered not that Culliney fortunes had split upon a rock; Marie—and the so-honest laundress—were entitled to their bit, as Culliney phrased it. But for their rectitude, he would be out a thousand francs, fifty good dollars.

So, without a quiver of countenance, he handed Marie one of the notes, and laughed away her gratitude.

It was not an easy thing to do, for with a thousand francs one might again essay the tables. But five hundred was too pitifully small a sum. Oh, well, this was not his season, and Deauville was not his place. Better that Marie should be made happy by his gift than that the tables should take it away from him.

With some small change he tipped the waiter, and then sat down by the open window and took stock. The five hundred franc note left to him after his generosity to Marie was the sum, practically, of his fortunes. Not enough to pay his hotel bill, not enough to stake him to another start at the tables, not enough for anything, except a bet on the races, and he shook his head at this idea. No gambling *at all*. Pressing your luck was all right when the luck was good, but not when it was bad.

He stared at the crowds that thronged the beach. He wondered how many of that gay gathering were unable to pay hotel bills, how many were thousands of miles from home, without a pal to kick in. . . .

He took off his dressing-gown, of heavy silk, and idly wondered what a French pawnshop would lend on it. Would his wardrobe fetch enough to pay his bill at the hotel and buy him passage home? He regretted that he had not been like other gamblers and in the hey-day of prosperity purchased jewelry which might now be sold.

But regrets were vain. He must march downstairs and inform the management that he was insolvent, and then—he shuddered, and colored with advance shame. He decided to postpone the inevitable. No hurry about being kicked out and jailed. Luck might turn, he hoped.

At least, he had the equivalent of twenty-five American dollars. He could buy a meal, enjoy a ride, get a chance to think. And a man couldn't think in Deauville, not even in the seclusion of his room; the place was too hectic; its atmosphere crowded through closed windows.

Someone had told him of the inn of William the Conqueror; it was only a few miles to the south, and was the most delightful luncheon place on earth; it was maintained. Quiet, and restful, and away from Deauville. He'd go there.

He dressed leisurely and made the usual stir among the feminine loungers in the lobby as he passed through an hour later. It didn't matter that their male companions shrugged, grudgingly admitted that he was a personable chap, and added that he was probably a politician or bootlegger. He was attractive and that satisfied the ladies.

Outside the hotel, he engaged a motor, bargained carefully, and started for the Inn of Guillaumele Conquerant. Forty minutes later he had surmounted the hills and had entered the ancient hostelry. In a patio, amid shrubs and flowers, he lunched magnificently; the eighty-year-old brandy was all that had been promised; the chicken was superb; the Norman cheese deli-

cious. A good finish; now for the hotel and—disgrace.

But, before that inglorious finish, a cigar, another glass of the marvelous brandy. . . . To think that old Bill the Conqueror had hit the hay in this very inn, had wrapped himself around a bunch of eats, and then, accompanied by his barons, set sail across the Channel and knocked Harold the Saxon for a row of ash-cans. Just a Norman baron today and a king tomorrow. He finished the brandy, lighted a fresh cigar, accepted his change from the waitress, and strolled across the patio.

The ancient man who owned the inn, and whose white beard and feeble frame made him seem a coeval of the Conqueror, had opened a door and was delivering a lecture to some guests dilating upon the beauties of the treasures of the old salon.

Culliney, lounging outside, heard a sharp Yankee voice. "I tell you, she's lived abroad since before the war; she never reads an American paper; she never mixes with Americans; she plays with the English colony at Cannes in the winter, and with the English at le Touquet in the summer. Except as a place where she sends a check for taxes, she doesn't know that Florida exists; it's on the map, that's all."

"But, man alive," said another voice, also masculine, "she must have heard of the Florida boom."

"I tell you she hasn't; she's a real expatriate, who thinks America vulgar and all that stuff. Now, her thousand acres are worth two million easy; half a mile of ocean frontage just north of Palm Beach—and, listen, Bill, she'll probably sell it for fifty thousand. And I have, right in my pocket, a bona-fide offer from Belmore—you know him; the biggest stock plunger in the country—of eight hundred thousand for the property. Now—you buy it, and sell to me, as Belmore's agent. Belmore, if he ever finds out, can't kick; he'll make a million for himself, anyway. What do you say?"

Bill laughed cynically. "Give me her name again."

Culliney was pressed against the wall now; his heart had ceased to beat. As though his mind was plastic clay, it received the name that the other man, Belmore's dishonest agent, uttered.

"Mrs. Bannard Volmer, Villa Rosa, le Touquet. What do you say?"

But Culliney didn't wait to hear the rest; the men might come out of the room; they talked freely in front of an ancient Frenchman who knew no English, but if they found a compatriot nearby, suspicion would be aroused. He sped silently across the patio and hailed his

chauffeur and stepped into his motor.

Of all the luck! Why had he gone broke last night? With just a few hundred dollars he could go to le Touquet, tie up this property owned by Mrs. Volmer. . . . He didn't doubt the words he'd overheard; he knew all about the Florida boom; the only dubious thing was Mrs. Volmer's ignorance of the miraculous increase in values. Had she no attorney to inform her? But never mind that—the thing now was to raise dough—enough dough to get away, to bind the property, and then, await the arrival of Belmore's agent.

He had recognized the voice; it was that of a man named Sinclair, whom he had met casually at the tables. The other man he didn't know, but that mattered nothing; he'd meet him in good time. Oh, Lord, if he'd only held out some dough. He could be as much of a conqueror as old William was in ten hundred and sixty-six.

Ten-oh-six-six! Six, six. SIX! The Lord knew hunches were terrible, but this was one, if he'd ever come up with one in all his life. Feverishly he searched his pockets. After paying for the car, he'd have sixty francs left, to a centime. Another six.

He alighted, half an hour later, at the Casino of Deauville. He entered and proceeded directly to the boule table, that imitation of roulette, which appeals only to the poorer classes, and in which the odds are terribly in favor of the bank.

The limit permitted on a number was sixty francs, and the odds were seven to one. He bought three twenty franc chips and placed them on six; the big rubber ball settled on his chosen number; he let his original stake ride; two again six came, and then, for an hour, his number came—as is so frequently the case in boule—every third or fourth roll of the ball.

Culliney quit the table three thousand francs ahead an hour after he had arrived. He glanced at his watch and hurried from the Casino; in a taxi he raced to the track; the sixth horse on the program of the entries in the sixth race galloped home ahead, and the pari-mutuals paid Culliney five to one. He had fifteen thousand francs.

His hotel bill amounted to twenty-five hundred francs, and he was able to engage a car to take him to le Touquet for another twenty-five hundred. At two in the morning he registered at the Hermitage Hotel, the possessor of nearly five hundred dollars if his currency were translated into American money. And at ten-thirty the following morning he was ushered, by a demure maid, into the presence of Mrs. Bannard Volmer.

She was an angular, coldly formal person, who resented his presence.

"Mr. Ward Culliney?" she inquired, looking up from the card which he had sent in to her.

He bowed.

"And what do you wish of me, Mr. Culliney?" she asked.

"I'm in the real estate business—in Florida," he lied. "I am associated with a group of men who are interested in acquiring your ocean frontage north of Palm Beach. Happening to be abroad, I thought it might be profitable for both of us if I came to see you. Do you wish to sell?"

Mrs. Volmer's acid face relaxed slightly. "I should rather say so. The beastly land has only cost me taxes for years. My late husband acquired it in a moment of madness, and five years ago I absolutely forbade my attorney to mention the matter to me again. He wrote me recently that the land had increased in value—at least, I believe that that was the purport of his note—I tore it up after reading a paragraph or so, and wrote him never to annoy me again with the matter unless someone wished to buy it."

It was incredible; this conceited woman, so swollen with vanity that she did not wish to be compelled to think. . . .

"Well, I wish to buy it," said Culliney. "I'll give—" he hesitated. He mustn't make his offer too small, nor too large. "I'll give one hundred thousand dollars for the land," he said.

"I will accept your offer," she replied without hesitation.

"Of course," he said, "it will take a long time to arrange for transfer, looking up title and all that. But if you'll sign a little agreement to sell, and accept a trifle—say five thousand francs, to bind the bargain?"

He paused expectantly. "Certainly," she replied. "Will you draw up the agreement, Mr. Culliney?"

"How shall I identify the land?" he asked, trembling lest the question arouse her latent shrewdness and expose his ignorance.

"You might simply say my Florida property lying north of Palm Beach," she suggested.

Culliney, drawing on his memory and imagination both, managed to write, on paper she provided him, an agreement. She signed it and accepted five thousand francs. He heaved a sigh; why, business was a lot softer than gambling. He should have gone into it long ago.

"You will hear from me soon; I'll cable today, Mrs. Volmer," he said.

"Thank you." She had melted, become a little more gracious now. "I am very grateful to you, Mr. Culliney. I'd never hoped to sell the property at all."

"Oh, things are booming in Florida," he said.

"Indeed. I hope you make a profit for yourself," she said. "Oh, by the way, shouldn't I have a copy of our agreement?"

"Of course," said Culliney. Laboriously he copied the document whereby Mrs. Volmer agreed to sell her Florida property situated north of Palm Beach to Ward Culliney for one hundred thousand dollars, and whereby Ward Culliney agreed to pay Mrs. Volmer the sum of one hundred thousand dollars, as soon as the title could be looked up and the deeds properly made out.

"Thank you," she said again, folding the paper away in an old-fashioned handbag. "Won't you stay to luncheon?"

He was about to refuse when a young girl entered the room; she backed away in sweet confusion, and Culliney changed his mind.

It was years since Ward Culliney had been entertained by gentlewomen. Once it would have been nothing unusual for well-bred people to entertain him at table, but that was long ago, before disinclination for work led him into actions that had debarred him from social intercourse, save that casual relationship that springs up at resorts.

But Anna Volmer was the sort of girl a chap used to know, in the days when innocence was nothing to be ashamed of; the kind of girl you might have taken canoe-ing on the Charles, or maybe, to a matinee when the Rogers Brothers played Boston. She was the sort of girl that maybe, when you were young, you met at a summer resort, and who traded a lock of hair for your high school frat pin.

She was nineteen, perhaps, but the sophisticated life she had lived, the contact with the world of fashion, had not spoiled her. Not hard like her mother, but gentle, sweet, demure. . . . When Culliney dragged himself away after luncheon, he had an engagement to play golf with her the next morning, to swim later. . . .

"One hundred percent rat, kid, that's you," he told himself in his room at the Hermitage. "Kidding a girl like that into believing that you're on the level. Kidding yourself into believing that, for a girl like that, you would *be* on the level. Well, Culliney my lad, you've had your dream. Now snap out of it and fade away."

But, before fading away, there were things to be done, and when Culliney felt that things were to be done, he economized neither with money nor time.

A telephone message to the Normandie assured him that Sinclair was still at Deauville, and Culliney hired another mo-

tor car to take him back to the resort whence he had come. This time, knowing that he would be unable to pay his bill, Culliney did not register at the Normandie; instead, he took a room in a modest hostelry, changed into evening clothes, and arrived at the Casino at about midnight. He found Sinclair standing by a baccarat table, and drew the man away.

"I'm Ward Culliney," he said.

Sinclair's eyebrows lifted. "I know that! we've met, Mr. Culliney."

"Sure. I just wanted to make it stick in your brain who and what I am. Listen; I overheard you talking in the William the Conqueror Inn yesterday, and know all about your deal with Belmore. Well, I've been to le Touquet and beaten you to it. I've bought Mrs. Volmer's Florida property. I paid her a hundred thousand—at least, that's what she agreed to sell for. But she gets Belmore's eight hundred thousand for it. Every nickel goes to her; understand? No dirty swindling, no trickery, nothing. Mind, you can't swindle her, because you must deal through me. I've paid her a small deposit—"

"My dear sir, do you mind telling me what you're talking about?" interrupted Sinclair.

"You know," said Culliney.

"I assure you that I don't," said the other.

"You mean to say that you weren't talking, yesterday with another man about Mrs. Volmer's property?"

"That's exactly what I mean to say. Who is Mrs. Volmer? Why did you pay her a hundred thousand dollars?"

There was a twinkle in the man's eye, and Culliney knew. Oh, how well he knew. How many times had he framed victims so that they walked into traps of his making. Without further word he turned his back and walked off. In an ante-room he examined the agreement which Mrs. Volmer had signed, a copy of which, with his signature, reposed in her possession.

He saw it all. He had agreed to pay one hundred thousand dollars for a piece of property which had not been designated clearly, which might be one acre of jungle, no more. He had paid two hundred and fifty dollars down to this woman who was a confederate of Sinclair, and signed a paper which, if he were really a rich man, would cost him a small fortune.

Trimmed! He had been eavesdropper to a conversation which had been meant for his ears alone. Sinclair thought him to be rich, and had skilfully planned a scene and conversation which would excite his cupidity, and he, Ward Culliney, a wise one, had fallen for the scheme.

But he didn't mind that; didn't mind Sinclair, his companion, or Mrs. Volmer. But the girl, Anna Volmer, so young, so sweet, so dear—was she a crook, too?

For her, this lovely girl who had brought back to him memories of days when he was young and decent, he had foregone the chance to make a fortune, he had thought. And now he learned that he was but the victim of crooks as unscrupulous as himself. Of course, not having any money, they could gain no more from him than the cash he had already given the woman who was so amazingly ignorant of Florida values.

But that wasn't the point. The point was, did Anna Volmer know of the scheme, was she a party to it?

He turned abruptly and walked back to the gaming rooms. He found Sinclair again and once more drew him aside.

"Listen," he said, "there's no hard feelings. I'm the rube who tried to be crooked. I've been examining the paper Mrs. Volmer gave me. Oh, don't pretend you're not on. I tell you I'm not sore. I tried to trim you and I'm trimmed. Fair enough. I won't squeal, but what I bought probably is only an acre of scrub palmetto, eh?"

Sinclair grinned. "As you take it this way, Mr. Culliney, I'll not kid you. We heard that one of the Cullineys of Toledo, the big department store people, was in Deauville, and—well, we made a play for you. But I'd never admit it in front of witnesses. But if you try to welsh, and the whole story comes out, it won't help your business standing in Ohio to have it known that you tried to profit by a talk you overheard."

Culliney shrugged impatiently. "I know that. The point is, one hundred thousand is a lot of dough, and I'll fight before I'll pay it."

So they thought he was one of the Toledo Cullineys, eh? Light began to filter through darkness; ways of exit became dimly visible. At three o'clock in the morning Sinclair and Culliney started for Deauville by motor car. At noon, in le Touquet, Sinclair and Mrs. Volmer had agreed to return Culliney's agreement, with his signature thereunto attached, for the sum of ten thousand dollars. At one o'clock Culliney had presented a certified check, on the Traders and Planters Bank of Toledo, Ohio, payable to himself, for twelve thousand five hundred dollars, and Sinclair had given him twenty-five hundred dollars in change.

At half-past two Culliney found Anna Volmer about to drive from the fourth tee of the le Touquet course.

"Look here, girlie," he said

abruptly, "I've found out I've been stung by your mama and Sinclair. Were you in on the play? I mean, if I'd been awkward, were you there to hop out and shoo me in?"

The girl dropped her demureness as one might shed a mask. "She isn't my mama. I'm on a percentage. If the sucker balks I come in and blush a few times and he usually is hooked."

"So I gathered," said Culliney drily.

"And now I suppose that out of the nobility of your heart you're going to offer to take me away from all this tawdry life in which I am enmeshed, eh?"

"I'm a crook, too," said Culliney. "I spent half an hour fixing up a certified check and twenty minutes more persuading Sinclair and your make-believe mama that they ought to give me back twenty-five hundred, and they fell for it. No, I wasn't intending to take you out of this tawdry, wicked life. I wasn't going to reform you, or anything like that. I was simply going to suggest that instead of playing somebody's daughter, you play somebody's wife. Between us, now that I've got a little stake, we ought to rip France wide open. I'm feeling lucky. You shoo them in, and I do the trimming."

"I wouldn't *play* at being anyone's wife; I'm decent—that way," she said slowly.

"And I couldn't let my *wife* join me in a crooked play," said Culliney, with equal slowness.

"There was a man here—lots of people who winter in Florida summer here in le Touquet," said the girl, "who wanted me to be hostess at a restaurant he's going to open in Palm Beach."

"I know an old-time gambler who's in the real estate racket down in Miami now," said Culliney. "I could land a job from him."

"I wonder how long we'd either of us stick at honest work," said the girl.

"Oh, *married* people have to be honest," said Culliney. "If only, you know, for the sake of —well, babies."

"Well, just as you say."

"I wonder," said Culliney, as he bent and kissed her swiftly, unmindful of the open-eyed French caddy, "if I ought to give Sinclair back his twenty-five hundred."

The girl looked at him. "I'm supposed to have twenty-five percent of every play they make," she smiled. "You gave them a check for twelve-five; give the money to me, Ward; it's my legitimate bit."

"Legitimate?" he murmured. "Girlie, I wonder what's legitimate?"

"Anything," she answered, "that brings the right man to the right girl."

And maybe she was right.

# blood of the innocent

*by . . . William C. Gault*

**What was the only way in which this woman—who was the personification of ageless evil—could be stopped for good?**

I WAS at the trial. I was a witness for the state. I gave all I knew, and tried to follow the rest, as well as I could. I could follow everything but the psychiatrist. He explained Carl in the terms of his trade, and I followed hazily, once he got wound up. One word stood out in my memory. He said the rug was a form of fetish, that Carl was a fetishist.

Webster didn't do me much good with the word, when I got home. It explained fetish as a charm, an object supposed to possess magical powers in curing disease, preventing harm, and so forth. The psychiatrist hadn't meant that. Another meaning was given—"fixation of interest on a part of the body, as a foot."

That wasn't what he meant, I was sure. I went down to the library, and looked it up in a book on psychiatry, and that brought me closer to the truth. I read:

*—an individual who obtains pleasure and excitement from touching or viewing some bit*

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*Some years ago William Campbell Gault was awarded an "Edgar" by the Mystery Writers of America for his brilliant first novel,* DON'T CRY FOR ME. *Since then he has become widely acclaimed for his haunting portrayals, in stories and novels, of those for whom violence is the solution.*

*of female apparel or an article belonging to a woman such as a bit of her hair or a glove. He may not desire—*

I read on, and on, and things began to make sense to me, even if I am depressingly normal. I could understand Carl, a little better, after I'd read it. And maybe myself, too. This word "normal" is just six letters, signifying nothing, really.

I could see, if one had the imagination, that the Kis Khilim would be a fetish, under those qualifications. Carl had a lot of imagination. And Carl had never had a girl . . . Oh, hell, maybe I'd better begin at the beginning.

He lived next to me, when I was a kid, and we played together, we were buddies all through grade school. In high school, we weren't that close.

I went out for football. I never climbed beyond the third team, understand, won nothing but a squad letter. But I went out, night after night, and got into some scrimmages, felt the gratifying satisfaction of bodily impact, of knifing through the interference and nailing some guy clean and hard.

I know the remark about the playing fields of Eton, but there's a chance, too, that this football is more substitute than preparation. I know what the long hairs think about it, but maybe if there was *more* football, there'd be *less* war. Just a minor league thought on a major league subject, and I hope you'll pardon me. I do my own thinking, and some of it isn't so good.

Carl used to watch the scrimmages. If he didn't like the game, why did he watch the scrimmages? There's a word you probably know, the word vicarious, and in the sense I'm using it, Webster defines it as enjoyment by one person through his sympathetic participation in the experience of another person. Rather, he defines *vicarious pleasure* as that, and I imagine Carl got some pleasure out of watching, or he wouldn't have stayed.

It's the same thing as reading, which has been described as second-hand living. Very few of us are immune, right?

Carl watched, saying nothing, and sometimes he'd wait until I'd taken my shower, and walk home with me. He didn't talk about football, much. He talked about girls, mostly. Did I think this one was prettier than that one? And how about their personalities; I was playing the field; which one did I think had the most charm, the most appeal?

It's flattering, when you're in high school, being consulted on a subject like that, being con-

sulted as an expert. Nobody would ever confuse me with Van Johnson, but I had the gift of gab, even in high school. I did fairly well, considering.

I would give him my considered, expert views on the subject. And one evening, I asked him, "Why don't you date a couple of them, Carl? You could work up a good line, and get by."

He flushed. "I get tongue-tied around them. They make me feel fat and coarse."

He wasn't that. He had a moon face, too pale, and his brown eyes were a little babyish. He had a round body, too, but it was stocky, not sloppy at all. I always thought he'd have made a good center or guard.

And he read a lot; he was an interesting talker on many subjects I knew nothing about.

"Well," I said, "you ought to try it. What can you lose? All they can say is 'no.' "

He shrugged. "I can't dance —and I can't talk that silly stuff they like to hear."

That was in high school.

I was out of high school two years before I opened my shop. I'd always been handy enough with tools; my thought was repairing good used furniture, refinishing it, and selling it.

I made the rounds of some of the town's shops before I opened my own, and learned one thing that was valuable. The word "ANTIQUES" on the window would draw a lot more solvent customers than the words "Second-hand furniture." So it was antiques. And, just for the hell of it, just to balance the window, another word, "OBJETS D'ART."

My dad sold oriental rugs, and he was sorry I didn't come in with him. But as consolation, I said I'd handle his used stuff. I guess a good oriental could be called an objet d'art. I handled a painting, or two, and some vases, but the furniture was my first love.

I did all right. I wasn't going to get rich, but neither was I going to get round shouldered from bucking an assembly line. I worked pretty hard, and didn't spend much money.

Even on the girls, I didn't spend too much.

I hung around Roseland a lot, and didn't have to spend too much on the girls. Roseland's a dance hall. Before you turn up your nose, or before you smirk, depending on your sex, let me explain that it's big and *clean* and the management keeps it that way.

All kinds of girls in a town this size. Well over half a million population in this town, and there's bound to be a lot of girls in that many people. And some of them are going to be lonely. And some of them just like to dance.

If you like to dance, *really* like it, where else can you go? To a night club, with a postage stamp floor and some screaming jump band? No. To private parties, maybe, if you're in that league. If you're not in that league, and you want some girls who can dance, you'll go to Roseland.

No debs, of course. But girls. Pretty and not so pretty, fat and thin and short and tall, good dancers and not so good. Romance, at eighty-five cents, including tax. Don't pity me; I was having the time of my life.

High school kids, and some older than that, working in offices, working in factories. Good bands, good floor, good time.

You don't drive them home the first time. But after you've become a regular, you get to know them well enough to take them home, and cliques form, and pretty soon you have beach picnics, and you go up to the house once in a while to hear some new records, and that's your social life.

And you save money.

I didn't fall in love for any period longer than two months. There were too many of them, each different.

It was on a warm June night I met Carl there. He was sitting at one of the tables near the soda fountain, drinking a big coke. He was alone at the table.

When he saw me, you'd think it was one of those Stanley-Livingstone deals.

"Marty," he said, and almost knocked the table over, getting up. "Golly, it's been a long time, Marty."

Not *that* long a time, I thought. I shook his hand, and smiled the big smile, and said, "Stepping out, Carl? I knew you'd do it, some time."

He smiled, too, and looked happy to see me. "Just watching," he said, "as usual. Maybe, one of these days, I'll get up enough courage to ask one to dance." He pointed to a chair. "Sit down, Marty, and tell me what you're doing."

The dancing hadn't started, so I sat down and told him what I was doing. While I was talking, I was studying him. He looked a bit thinner, and a lot more mature. His eyes were still a baby's eyes, but there was something there I couldn't define, a sort of intelligence beyond me.

When I'd finished, he said, "That must be interesting. I wish I could do something like that."

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"Working in the plant, at Globe," he said quietly. "My dad died, you know, Marty."

His dad had been a widower. "I know," I said. "Where you living now, Carl?"

"I've got a house all to myself," he answered. "It isn't

much of a house, one of those back lot cottages, you know. But I'm fixing it up. You'll have to come and see me, Marty. Maybe you can give me some ideas for it."

"Sure," I said, "I'll do that, Carl." The music was starting now, and I rose. "I'll see you, if you come here, often. I've got this first dance." I winked at him, and left him there.

I saw him a couple of times, that night, but not to speak to. I saw him on the sidelines, watching.

The Saturday following that, he came into my shop. He didn't work on Saturdays. "One of the few blessings of my job," he told me. "And another is that I don't have to think about it, once I've punched out, at night."

"You're lucky," I said. "I'm thinking about this joint all the time."

"I'll bet," he said. "I'll bet a fellow with as many girls as you have worries about business."

I didn't say anything to that. I felt uncomfortable, for some reason.

He looked kind of uncomfortable, too. He said, "I expected to see you up there, last night."

"Up there—?"

"Roseland," he said. And then he paused. "You'd have seen me dance, if you'd been up there. You'd have got a laugh out of it."

"Like hell," I said. "Carl, let me congratulate you."

He grinned, and took the hand I extended. "Just one girl, though. Maybe you know her. Her name is Ann Hamid."

I shook my head. "She come up there often?"

"Not very often. I watched her, that night I met you, and she didn't dance much." He flushed. "Well, I've been practicing, at home, and last night, she was at Roseland, and I asked her. It was easy. It wasn't hard. I just picked the slow numbers, the odd numbers."

The odd dances were usually waltzes, on Friday nights. I wondered if this girl was an "odd number," too. I said, "What's she like? Maybe I'd recognize her, if you described her to me."

"She's short and dark and quiet," he said. "She's—Turkish, Marty." He took time out to flush again. "You'd think she was my girl, or something, the way I talk."

"Stay with it," I said, "and maybe she will be."

"Maybe—" he said, and there was one of those silences.

My eye fell on the rug I had in the window, and it seemed like a logical thing to talk about.

I said, "Maybe that rug in the window is a good omen, Carl. It's a Kis Khilim."

He looked puzzled. "That's a new one on me. I know a few things about rugs, but what's a Kis Khilim?"

"Some people call them 'Bride's rugs,' " I said. "They're woven in Anatolia by the Turks. The story goes that young girls weave them, each one trying to finish the rug in time to win a husband. Sometimes, they're part of the dowry. Sometimes, they'll weave a lock of their hair into the rug."

Carl went over to inspect it. No nap to it, the design on it running through, both sides smooth. Mainly they're used as hangings, or to cover a divan. This one had some embroidery on it, too.

"From Turkey," he said, and he was talking to himself. "A bride's rug." Then he turned to me. "How much, Marty?"

"To you, to my friend, sixty-five dollars," I said. "I don't mind losing money to friends."

"Stop it," he said, and grinned. "Anyway, I haven't got sixty-five dollars."

"Well," I said, "in that case—"

But he held up a hand. "No pressure. I'm going to need what money I've got. I'm going to buy a couple of suits."

Any time a guy like Carl buys more than one suit at a time, you can bet that Love has reared its lovely head. Somewhere, in this tone poem, I said he never had a girl, and that isn't true, I guess.

He had this Ann, Ann Hamid. For a while, anyway. I don't know whether she loved him, or not, but Carl—?

He introduced me to her Sunday night. They'd come to Roseland together, and I met them over near the fountain, the same place I'd met Carl, over a week earlier.

The way he looked at her, I knew he was gone, but good. "This is Ann Hamid, Marty." And to her. "Marty's my best friend."

I hadn't seen him for two years, but I was his best friend. I smiled at her, and said I was glad to know her, and then, for some reason I stopped smiling.

She was short, as he'd said, and dark. She was slim. But I couldn't tell if she was eighteen or eighty. She had a perfectly smooth face, but it was stone-smooth, if you get me. It wasn't indicative of youth, particularly.

Her eyes were dark. Her eyes met mine, and went probing into my brain. They weren't old eyes; they were brilliant, but they gave the impression of having seen more than a *young* lady could.

Marty's my best friend . . . When he'd said it, I hadn't realized how true it was. But I thought of it, throughout that evening. He might not have been my best friend. But I was

his. I don't know why I should have been thinking these things; I don't know why I should appoint myself his unofficial keeper.

But when he came to me toward the end of the evening, and told me he was taking Ann home, I said, "I've got my car. Wait for me, and I'll give you a lift."

"That would be fine," he said. "I'll go tell Ann."

I went to look up Ruth Allen. I wanted Ruth to meet this girl; I've a lot of faith in Ruth's judgment.

When I asked to take her home, she said, "This is the first offer from you in two weeks, Marty. I was beginning to lose hope." Her blue eyes were mocking me.

"There's a girl going along, with a friend of mine, Ruth," I told her, "I wanted your opinion of her."

"My opinion?" She frowned. "You've finally fallen, and you want *my* opinion of the girl? I'll give it to you, now—I don't like her."

"Wait'll you see her," I said. "You won't think I've fallen for her, after that."

She was still frowning. "What is this, Marty? You're not making sense."

"I know it," I said. "You see, this friend is gone on her. And she—well, she gives me the shivers, for some reason. I think a lot of your judgment, Ruth. I wanted to see if you could explain to me—" I was getting too involved, and I broke off.

Ruth smiled. "All right, all right, Marty. You've got *me* interested, now. I'll see you, after the last dance, in front of the check-room."

We all met there, and I performed the introductions. I couldn't help but compare Ruth and Ann, as I introduced them. I knew Ruth's age, and I tried to use her as a comparison.

But it didn't help. Ruth had the bloom, and Ann didn't. But I've seen them sixteen years old, without the bloom, so that proved nothing.

We went over to the Yankee Doodle for hamburgers and coffee. Ann hadn't done much talking, but the rest of us made up for her. Especially Carl. He prattled like a kid on his first date, which he was.

The Yankee Doodle is well lighted, a clean bright place with the best hamburgers in town. Under the bright lights overhead, I had my first really clear look at Ann. I was aware that Ruth was giving her the same close scrutiny.

I saw no more than I'd seen under the dimmer glow of Roseland. I saw the smooth face, and the brilliant eyes, the dark hair, the slim figure, a figure without sag.

Carl said, "I know she's

pretty, Marty. But you don't have to stare at her."

"I stare at all pretty girls," I said.

Ann smiled, and her eyes met mine briefly, wonderingly. She said nothing. I had the feeling she was appraising me.

Ruth said, "There's an empty booth, in the corner." Very cool, her voice was.

We sat in the corner booth, and ordered.

For the first time, Ann volunteered some dialogue. Up to now, she'd only answered direct questions. She asked, "Marty, is that your shop, that antique place on North, near the library?"

"Guilty," I said.

"Carl tells me you have a Kis Khilim."

"I have. I've been trying to sell it to him. How did you know I had the shop?"

"I go by there, occasionally."

"Lately?" I asked.

She looked puzzled. "Quite recently. Why?"

"I thought you might have seen it," I said. "It's been in the window for a month."

"No," she said, after a moment, "I didn't see it. But I'd like to."

How did I *know* she was lying? Why did I wonder if she'd seen the rug *before* she'd seen Carl? I said, "Well, maybe if I can't sell it to Carl, I can sell it to you."

She smiled. "Maybe," she said. One thing I noticed when she smiled, she didn't reveal her upper teeth. Her upper lip was fairly long, and it didn't curl upward, when she smiled.

Nothing important happened, after that. We ate; the three of us talked, and Ann listened.

I drove Ann home first. She lived in one of the apartment buildings on Prospect, or rather one of the old mansions now converted to apartments. Carl lived not far from there, on the lower east side, and I took him home next.

When he'd said goodnight, and left us, Ruth sighed.

"Bored?" I asked. "My friends bore you?"

"No," she said quietly. "They scared me."

We were driving by an intersection, and I looked at her in the glow from the street lamp overhead. "Scared you—? Carl?"

"Yes, Carl. But mostly that Ann. Golly, Marty, I don't know what it is, but I kept thinking of mummies."

I laughed. "She's not *that* old," I said.

"She'll never see thirty again, I'd bet. But that isn't it. She's so—quiet, and so sort of—watchful—I can't explain it. Have you got a cigarette, or do I smoke my own?"

I handed her my pack, without looking at her. I handed her my lighter. "All right, you don't like her. But why Carl? Carl's

just another guy in love for the first time."

"He's not in love," Ruth said. "Any more than you are. He's fascinated by her. He's—*bewitched;* is that the word?"

"I always called it love," I said. "I will make you a small bet that it *is* love, and that he marries her, before the year is gone."

"I wouldn't bet," she answered. "He might marry her, and how could you prove it was or wasn't love? Unless you could read his mind."

"All right," I said, "we'll say he doesn't love her. But why should he scare you?"

Ruth expelled a mouthful of smoke. "That's what I've been trying to figure out. He gives the impression of—knowing things we don't, Marty. I mean, *I* don't."

"He knows a lot of things neither of us will ever know, probably," I said. "But that wouldn't scare you, would it?"

"It shouldn't," Ruth agreed. "Unless they're the kind of things we aren't supposed to know. Oh—I sound silly, don't I? I'm not smart." She put a hand on my arm. "I just don't *like* them. Let's talk about something else."

So we talked about something else. But I can't remember what it was, now.

When I dropped her off, she said, "I'll be seeing you around, Marty." Then she stood there for a moment, on the curb. "I'm sorry I said what I did, if this Carl is a good friend of yours."

"I hadn't seen him for two years, until last week," I said. "He's just a guy who reads too much, Ruth." I didn't drive away, but sat there, looking at her in the dimness, really looking at her for the first time. "You'll see me," I promised, "whether you want to or not."

She shook her head. "Never at a loss for an exit line, are you?" Now I could see her smile. "Stay away from that Ann." She turned, and went up the walk to her house.

Sweet girl, Ruth. Chestnut hair and those bright, blue eyes. Slim legs and a proud figure. Comfortable girl to be with, and she'd never be a nagger.

So why should I be thinking of Ann, all the way home?

I was sanding a cherry drop leaf table when Ann came into the shop next morning. She nodded to me, smiled a greeting, and then went directly to the rug in the window.

I watched her finger it. I saw the rapt attention she was giving it, and I heard but couldn't understand the exclamation that escaped her throat. It could have been Turkish.

"Something wrong, Ann?" I asked, coming forward.

She turned to face me. "No,

nothing. I—" She turned back to the rug. "Where did you get this?"

"From my dad. One of his customers traded it in." I paused. "You recognize it?"

A smile on her face, now, an ironic smile. "I—thought so." She turned to face me again. "Will you find out where your dad got it?"

"I know," I said. "A man named Catrell. Lives out in River Hills."

She frowned. "Catrell." She shook her head.

"His wife is half Turkish," I said. "Her father was Turkish. My dad sold him rugs, years ago. His name was Medjid."

She seemed to flinch, and her voice was hoarse. "Med—Talat Medjid?"

I nodded.

Her eyes closed, and for a moment I thought she was going to faint. Then her eyes opened, and she sighed. She shook herself, slightly.

Her voice was clear again. She was under control. "That embroidery on it. That—was added later, don't you think?"

I shrugged. "Could be."

"And this—this Talat Medjid—he came from Ankara?"

I tried to remember. "My dad told me, once, when I was a kid. I think it was Ankara, all right."

"How long ago did this Talat die?"

"About five years ago," I said. "He was an old man."

There was a gleam in those bright eyes, now, a gleam I could only diagnose as triumph. "Five years—" she said, and nodded. "Talat—"

"You knew him?" I asked.

She didn't answer that. She was giving me the appraisal, again. "You don't like me, do you, Marty?"

"What makes you think that?" I countered.

"I can tell. I can—sense it. Why don't you like me?"

"You're putting thoughts in my head that aren't there," I said. "I don't know you, so I can't dislike you."

Again, she smiled, and again she didn't uncover her upper teeth. "We won't quarrel," she said. "You're a friend of Carl's, and I won't quarrel with you."

"I never quarrel with a prospective customer," I said. "You want that rug, don't you?"

She shrugged. "I think Carl wants it. He'll probably buy it."

I grinned at her. "I'll bet he doesn't know he wants it, yet."

She stared at me a second. "You've known a lot of girls, haven't you, Marty?" Her voice was light, but not naturally so.

"No more than anybody else, probably."

"More than Carl, though?"

"More than Carl. Carl never had much to do with girls."

She was at the door, now.

"I'm glad of that," she said, and left.

Perhaps, if Carl had known more girls he wouldn't have read so much. That would have been a lucky break for her, but she didn't know it at the time, of course. And neither did I.

I went back to the drop leaf table, and worked on it until lunchtime.

Then I phoned the Catrell residence, and asked for Mrs. Catrell.

After I'd identified myself, I said, "I've that Kis Khilim you traded to my father, Mrs. Catrell. I thought if I could get some of the history of it, it might help sell it. I wondered if you knew its history?"

"I should," she said. A pause. "Will you be in your shop all afternoon?"

I said I would.

"Well, I'm going downtown about one-thirty, and I'll stop in. Dad talked about that rug quite a lot."

I'd finished sanding the table, now, and when I came back from lunch, I started to varnish it.

Mrs. Catrell came in while I was doing that. She's a woman of about fifty, short, stout and cheerful, and she'd been a good customer of my dad's for years.

She said, "I'll get a commission, won't I? My time's valuable, you know, Martin."

I grinned at her. "I know. I'll sell you your antiques at a discount, to pay you back."

"You're your father's son, all right," she said. Then she sat down and told me about Talat Medjid, her father.

He'd lived in Ankara as a youth many years ago. This was before polygamy was abolished in Turkey, of course, and before the stricter European views on love and marriage had permeated the Turkish people.

"That Khilim was woven by a girl he loved deeply, as deeply as only the very young can love, you understand, Martin. When he discovered how evil, how *strange* she was, his love died. The girl disappeared. All this he's told me, of course; it was long before I was born. She left the rug behind, when she disappeared. Dad met my mother, soon after that, and they came to this country."

The eyes of Mrs. Catrell were reminiscent. "Dad brought the rug along." She rose, to go over and stand near it. "Mother added this embroidery." She smiled. "Mother said that made it *her* 'Bride's Rug,' too. That was sixty years ago, Martin."

"I'm surprised that you'd sell it," I said.

She didn't look at me. She looked at the rug, as she said, "It's been more bad memory than good, Martin. I always felt mother resented it. I always felt it made her unhappy, knowing

that someone had loved dad before she did. But she wouldn't say anything to him, naturally. She never said anything that might displease him."

"Your dad said this girl was evil, was strange. How was she strange?"

Mrs. Catrell turned to face me. "I don't know, exactly. Those old people had their old country superstitions, you know. He used to say—'She was not of this world' and I think he meant just that, that she was some kind of witch."

She came over to pick up her purse and gloves. "Just before dad died—he asked to see this rug once more. That's why I traded it to your father. And that, young man, is a story I don't want you to sell with the rug. You can use everything but that."

"Thanks, Mrs. Catrell. Thank you very much," I said.

She was at the door, now. "I'll bet you didn't expect that much of a history, did you?"

I assured her that I hadn't.

Ann had said, "That embroidery was added later—don't you think?"

It had been added later. It had been added sixty years ago. But how had Ann known? It had been Mr. Medjid's, and then Mrs. Catrell's. Yet, Ann had recognized it, I felt sure.

*She was not of this world . . . Old country superstitions . . .* I'm a reasonable guy, more or less, but I was suddenly nervous, alone there, in the shop.

At four-thirty, Carl phoned. He said, "I've been thinking about that Kis Khilim, Marty. What's your bottom price?"

"Sixty-five dollars," I said. "It's no bargain, at that, even though it is old. Do you really want it?"

"I really want it." A silence. "How old is it?"

"I couldn't say, exactly. But it's over eighty years old."

"Wouldn't that make it more valuable?"

"Very little, for a rug of this sort."

"I see. But I want it. Should I come down and get it?"

"I'll be closing up, pretty soon," I told him. "I'll drop it off on the way home, Carl. Then I can see your place."

"Fine," he said. "Though it isn't much to look at, yet."

He was right about that. It was a small, sagging frame cottage on the rear of a deep lot.

The inside was divided into three rooms and a bath, and was little improvement over the exterior. The main room was furnished with solid but ugly mission oak, and boasted only one fine piece of furniture, a beautiful, massive Capehart. There was a small, dull kitchen—and his study-bedroom.

This study had been lined with permanent bookcases by

somebody who wasn't too handy with tools. Three entire walls in this room were lined with books, crammed with books. And there were others piled on the floor.

There was an old leather chair in this room, with a bridge lamp next to it. There was a light green Kirman in this room, a beautiful rug, with a delicate floral pattern.

I took time out to admire that.

Carl said, "I've got that, and the Capehart. I used what I inherited for those two things. The rest will have to come more slowly."

He nodded toward a studio couch. "I thought the Kis Khilim would make a good cover for that."

I spread it over the studio couch, and it looked all right. He nodded, studying it. Then he faced me.

"What do you think of Ann, Marty?"

"She asked me that, this morning," I said. "I've never—met a girl quite like her."

He smiled, misunderstanding my meaning. "She's unusual, isn't she? She's fascinating."

*So's a cobra,* I thought. I said, "Pretty far gone, Carl?"

He nodded, flushing a little. "From the first evening. And—it isn't only my lack of experience, Marty. If I'd been dating girls all my life, it would still be Ann, for me. She's what I've waited for."

I said as casually as I could, "How old is she, Carl?"

He looked at me steadily. "I don't know. I don't care, Marty. Why did you ask that?"

"I just wondered. With some girls, it's hard to tell. She seems to have more—poise than most girls."

He smiled. "That's right. She also knows more than most girls." He looked away. "That may be why she seems—older."

I looked around at the books, once more, before I left. If age increased their value as much as it did some furniture and rugs, he must have had a lot of money on those shelves. For many of the books were ancient, calf-bound and morocco editions.

When I got home again, I phoned Ruth. I said, "How about some nice light movie, tonight? Something bright and cheerful?"

"This is very short notice for a girl of my popularity," she said, "but I'll accept on one condition."

"Which is—?"

"That we don't have to take that Ann along. Carl, I can take, but that Ann—"

"We'll go alone," I said. "Seeing Ann today is one reason I want something cheerful tonight."

"You'll have to tell me about that," she said.

I told her about it when I picked her up. I told her all of Mrs. Catrell's story she wanted told, and all about Ann's visit, and our dialogue. I told her about Carl's phone call.

When I'd finished, she said, "If I weren't almost sane, I could make a story out of that."

"Let's hear it," I said, "and then I'll give you my version."

"Maybe it's the same story," Ruth said. "Maybe we're both thinking this Ann is the same girl who wove the rug in Ankara, over eighty years ago."

"We'd have to be crazy to believe that, wouldn't we?"

"We would have to know a lot less *or an awful lot more* than we know, now, Marty. What movie did you have in mind?"

"Anything light. Anything funny."

"Danny Kaye's at the Uptown," she said.

It was a funny picture, but not funny enough. Even Ruth's banter couldn't dispel the dark mood I was in. What was Carl to me? Why should I fret about him, and what, actually, was there to worry about, anyway? Unless I was to believe the unbelievable.

But after I took Ruth home, I drove around aimlessly for a while. At least, I thought I was driving aimlessly until I turned up Carl's block.

There was a light on, in the back cottage, and I stopped.

There were no lights on in the front house, and the path was dark, leading to the rear. I'm not superstitious, but I sensed that someone was watching me as I made my way toward the light, through the dark yard. I felt a *presence,* a sense of pervading evil hanging over that sagging cottage.

Through the thin door, I could hear music from the Capehart. I knocked.

The music continued, but there was no other sound. I knocked again.

It was after the second knock I realized I might be indiscreet. It was after eleven, and— I turned, to go.

It was at that moment, I heard the moan, through the thin door. It was Carl's voice.

I pushed the door open, and stepped in.

Carl sat in a worn mission oak armchair, slumped back, his eyes closed, his whole body limp. His lips were moving.

I heard, "—Ann—love—" and then some mumbled, incoherent sentences. His face was white. From one limp wrist, blood trickled.

I was reaching over, to grasp his shoulder, when his eyes opened. "Marty—" he mumbled, and smiled at me.

"I'll call a doctor," I said. "What's happened, Carl?"

He shook his head weakly. "No doctor. No, no— Would

you get me a glass of water, Marty?"

"But you're hurt, Carl," I said. "Are you drunk? Look—" And I lifted his wrist, to show him the cut, on the inside.

Only it wasn't a cut. It looked something like a bruise. It was a mottled blue and yellow.

The thing that really stopped me, though, were the two spaced holes in the center of the bruise, two punctures.

The Capehart was pouring sound now, it was a symphony, and reaching a terrific crescendo. I went over to shut it off.

"No doctor," Carl repeated. "Water—Marty—"

I went out to the kitchen, to get him some water. When I brought it back, he was sitting up more in the chair, and breathing through his mouth. He had wrapped a handkerchief around his wrist.

He drank the water slowly, saying nothing. When the glass was empty, he set it on the floor, and looked at me.

"An accident," he said. "I fell, outside, and must have cut my wrist on something. I didn't realize how much blood I'd lost until I began to get weak."

"Sure," I said. "So you came in here, and put some records on, and sat around, bleeding to death. Come again, Carl."

His eyes didn't waver. "I don't know what you mean, Marty."

"The hell of it is, I don't, either," I said, "but maybe we could call the police in, and they could find out."

"The police—?" he said, and smiled. "What would we tell them, Marty?"

"You'd have to do the talking," I said. "I don't know anything."

He was still watching me steadily. "There isn't anything I'd want to tell them. There isn't anything they could do for me."

"And there's nothing *I* can do for you, either?"

He nodded. "You could see if the Kis Khilim is still in the study. I'm a little too weak, yet, to navigate."

I rose impatiently, and went to do as he'd suggested. The rug was still there, and I came back to tell him that.

Something like relief in his eyes. "Good," he said. "That's fine. That's—*bait*, Marty. You came at a good time."

"You mean she'll be back for it?" I said.

His face was impassive, a sallow moon in the room's dimness. "Don't think about what I might mean, Marty. This isn't anything you're prepared to understand. Be a friend, Marty, and leave me now."

"I'd be a poor friend, if I left you, now," I said. "I'm staying here, tonight, Carl. I'm not leaving you alone."

He sighed. "All right. To-

night won't interfere with my plans, I guess." He looked at me sadly. "How can a person be so—so wrong about another person, Marty?"

The impassivity was gone; his face was breaking into anguish, now. A sob escaped him, and there were tears, suddenly, in his eyes.

It wasn't something I could watch. I went to phone mom, and tell her I wouldn't be home, tonight. The phone was in the study-bedroom.

When I came back into the living room, Carl's face was again composed. He said, "What did you and Ann talk about, today?"

I told him, and then I told him about Mrs. Catrell and Talat Medjid, who'd loved the weaver of his Kis Khilim, and Talat's words, "She was not of this world."

Carl was silent all through the story, and when I'd finished, he nodded, as though it confirmed something he knew, or had suspected.

There was a silence, and then he said, "Don't think about it, Marty." He gripped the sides of his chair. "Let's go into the study. You must be ready for bed."

I went over to help him, but he waved me away. "I'm all right, now."

But he was shaky, as we went into the bedroom. He showed me how to pull the studio couch out to make a double bed. While I was doing this, he had rummaged through one of the stacks of books on the floor, and pulled out a thin, tattered volume in scuffed leather.

He sat in the big chair near the lamp, and began to read.

"Don't you think you'd better get to bed, Carl?" I asked him.

"Later," he said, without raising his eyes. "I'll be all right. I want to read some of this—"

He was still reading, when I fell asleep.

I woke up once, and the room was dark, but Carl still sat in the big chair. In the dim light from the moon, coming through the window to his right, I could see he had the Kis Khilim in his lap. There was no indication of whether he was sleeping, or not.

The next time I woke up, it was morning—and Carl was not in the room.

The book he'd been reading was titled, THE LIVING DEAD, its author identified as Lord Douglas Galvany. It was open on the floor, and I kept his place. I read:

*—for it is the love of the innocent which sustains them beyond the human span; it is the blood of the innocent which nurtures the illusion of eternal youth. Deprived of these twin requisites, acceler-*

*ated disintegration through the normal, human aging process will continue as before, the ravages of years will occur in a single week, a sight not . . . .*

I was interrupted by a pounding that shook the frail house, a hammering that seemed to come from directly beneath me. I slipped into my shoes, and went out into the living room.

The pounding was coming from the cellar, and I went into the kitchen, searching for the cellar entrance.

I found it, walked down two steps, and called, "Carl—?"

No answer.

I walked down three more steps, and the entire cellar was in view. Frail though the house was, this was a sturdy foundation, of brick, with hand-hewn oak joists and beams.

With a machinist's ball peen hammer, Carl was pounding a huge eye bolt through a hole in one of the heavy pillars supporting the main beam.

He saw me, then, and stopped his work. He made no effort to explain, but asked, "Hungry? I'll be up in a minute."

There was a brace and bit on the earth floor near him. The Kis Khilim was folded across a saw horse nearby.

"What are you doing, Carl?" I asked.

"I'll be up in a minute," he said. "I just want to bolt this through the pillar." He was frowning. "The less you know, the better, Marty. I'll be up in a minute."

I went back up the steps. In the kitchen, I put some water on the stove, for coffee, and went back into the study, to dress. Carl came up before I'd finished dressing.

He put the book away, and sat in the big chair.

"You know a lot more than I do, Carl," I said, "but I'm not completely stupid, you know. You've let your temper get the upper hand in this business."

He shook his head solemnly. "No, I haven't, Marty. I know what I'm doing." He sighed. "Evil and age, they seem to go together, don't they? Evil and age—"

He wasn't looking at me, nor talking to me, now. His eyes held a light I'd never seen there before, a brilliance that is associated, in my limited knowledge, with insanity.

He said nothing to me through breakfast.

But before I left, he said, "Would you take that Kirman along, and try and sell it for me? I need the money. I'm quitting my job."

"It's the kind of a rug that needs time for a proper sale," I said. "You can lose money on a desperation sale of a piece like that."

He nodded. "I know. Just do your best, Marty."

I took the Kirman along, but I didn't take it to the shop. Dad would be able to handle it more profitably than I would, so I took it over there.

I told him that time was important in the deal, and cash.

Then I went back to my own shop and tried to forget Carl and Ann, and the whole rotten business.

For two days, I heard nothing from him. Two days in which I worked hard every day, and saw Ruth each evening. I didn't tell her anything about my visit to Carl's house, and she showed no interest in either of them.

Friday, dad called to tell me he'd sold the Kirman for fourteen hundred dollars. I went over and picked up the money, and took it to Carl.

He answered the door to my knock, but he didn't invite me in. His face was pale, his eyes shadowed. His hands shook as he took the money.

I could see from the doorway that the Capehart was gone.

"Fourteen hundred," I said. "Not bad, not good. You've sold the Capehart, too?"

He nodded. "Fourteen hundred. That's—fine, Marty."

"I'm not asking for a commission," I said, "but you could invite me in for a drink."

He shook his head. "No, not now, Marty. I appreciate it. You know that." He peeled off some of the bills and put them in my hand. "Take these. Please, take these, but don't come in, now."

"You're sick, Carl," I said. "You need—"

He started to close the door. It was almost closed, when I heard the moan, when I heard the rattle of chains. The sounds were muffled, as though coming from the cellar.

I put my foot against the door. I said, "Carl, for God's sake—"

He flung the door wide, and glared at me. "Damn you, Marty," he said hoarsely, "will you leave? This is my home. I've a dog for protection. I've got him chained up in the basement. He's a vicious brute, Marty, and he doesn't like strangers."

It wasn't a growl, I'd heard, and it wasn't a bark. It had been a human sound, I'd heard, or nearly human. I said, "I'll go, Carl. If you want me, if you need me, you can phone."

He closed the door.

I should have gone to the police, then, probably But what could I tell them that would make sense? If I told them what I thought, I'd wind up in the observation ward at Brookings. And if what I tried not to think was true, Carl was better equipped to handle it than the police.

*. . . the love of the innocent, the blood of the innocent . . .* Carl was an innocent, all right.

But Carl had read, read, read.

And I thought of other things, too, but I put them from my mind; I kept busy, on the move, never giving myself time to think.

A week went by, and I heard nothing from him. Two weeks went by. The third week, the papers screamed it.

*. . . today broke into a small cottage at 3233 B. N.—Street, and uncovered one of the most ghastly . . . body of an aged woman, her right ankle chained to one of the heavy pillars . . .*

I read it all, and took a deep breath. I remembered:

*. . . deprived of these twin requisites, accelerated disintegration through the . . .*

Carl had done a better job than the police could have. Carl had protected other innocents. Carl had watched her grow older, day by day . . . I began to get sick.

There was no sign of Carl at the cottage. There was no indication that the woman had been starved, or otherwise mistreated beyond her long and cruel imprisonment.

The more sensational papers called him a "fiend," the "mad jailer," and other more imaginative epithets. The sensational papers afforded their readers excellent pictures of the cottage, the basement and the chains, elaborated on the story with recounts of other particularly loathesome murders of a like nature.

It was quite a blow to them when the coroner's inquest established that death had been caused by old age, and not mistreatment.

I kept remembering how she'd kept her upper teeth covered, but there was no mention made in the paper of her teeth. With age, their sharpness might have been blunted, if they were, if—well, what can I do but guess?

The search for Carl went on.

Four days later he was found upstate, sleeping in a deserted cabin in the woods, sleeping on the Kis Khilim. He was weak from hunger; and near death.

They brought him back to comparative health for the trial. Physical health, that is. Mentally, he was a vacuum. He remembered nothing, not even his name. It may have been a sham, but he maintained it stubbornly.

In court, when I was on the witness stand, he watched me all through my testimony, but there was no sign of recognition in those dull eyes.

I thought my story would get me confined, along with Carl, but I told them only what I'd

seen and heard, not what I thought. All I got out of it was a lot of unpleasant publicity.

Carl was committed to Brookings.

Three days after he was confined, he managed to get a kitchen knife, somehow, and take his own life.

In the weeks since, I've been questioned a lot. By sincere people and by busybodies. None of them can believe it, but neither can any of them explain how Ann Hamid could have vanished completely.

Only Ruth seems to understand. I spend a lot of time with Ruth, and we don't talk about it, at all.

## SOLUTIONS TO CRIME I.Q.

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# matinee for murder

*by . . . Alan E. Nourse*

**These were bad quarrels, with ugly scars and ugly bruises and uglier memories left behind — preludes to the inevitable climax.**

HE KNEW that he was going to kill Kitty the day he found the money in her jewelry box.

You couldn't call it premeditated murder. He didn't want to do it. He wasn't the sort of man who could sit down cold-bloodedly and plan a murder; the idea filled him with loathing. Everything in Harvey Turner's mild nature screamed out at the thought of lifting a finger against Kitty. And yet, for months the anger had been growing, welling up from deep in his thighs and chest and shoulders. It had twisted through his mind like a malignant growth. Now, as he stared down at the money, it crystallized—the sure, animal knowledge that he was going to kill her.

He knew what the money was for. It lay in the cherrywood box on her dresser—the one Kitty called her "jewelry box" with that sneering laughter in her voice. They both knew the junk she kept there wasn't worth a box to keep it in. An accountant's salary couldn't make a down payment on the kind of jewelry Kitty wanted. But now

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*Alan E. Nourse is the author of interesting suspense stories in both the mystery and* SF *fields, such as his* MARTYR, *the novel featured in the January 1957 issue of our companion magazine,* FANTASTIC UNIVERSE. *Here he turns to the problem of this man who* knew *his wife had certain outside interests.*

there was money there—fives, tens and twenties in a crisp green bundle with a rubber band around it. How much? He didn't count it. Plenty for what she wanted. It would be nice to think she'd saved it to buy something special for him—but he knew better than that. Not Kitty. The only surprise she was planning for him with that money was the surprise of coming home one day to an empty flat, to find Kitty gone for good—

*Gone with Brownie,* Harvey thought bitterly. *Gone with a sleazy two-bit gambler who wouldn't leave her a good laugh when he got through with her . . .*

But Harvey knew he'd never let that happen. He could take Kitty's sneers and lies and ridicule. He could stand her cheap affairs that she hardly even bothered to conceal any more. He could even bear the bitter specter of failure, the cruel knowledge that he was a flop, a miserable nothing of a man with a colorless, tasteless past and no future in sight—as long as he had Kitty.

But he'd never let her leave him—alive.

Harvey Turner poured some of the cheap bourbon into a glass, felt it cut his tongue and burn its way down as he stared through the apartment window at the street below.

Where was she now? With Brownie? She wouldn't be expecting him home for at least another hour. His knuckles tightened on the tumbler as he searched the narrow, dirty street below for some sign of her—a flash of red hair, a tall slender figure, slim hips, long shapely legs. All he saw was a row of dingy shops, the old corner movie theater a block away with its jutting, black-lettered marquee announcing the third-run pictures that changed every week. *Why didn't she come home? What were they doing? Planning how they could skip, where they could go so he'd never trace them? Or were they too busy with other things to worry about planning, just then?*

He poured more whiskey with trembling hands and waited. He'd known about Brownie for a long time. Brownie was tall and sleek, and always wore a snappy sport coat and took the best table at Luigi's in the evening. Brownie had his fingers in the numbers pie with the crowd uptown. He liked his cars low and his women red-headed. He caught Kitty as she and Harvey walked into Luigi's together one night, and he couldn't keep his eyes off her. After a while he strolled over to Luigi behind the bar. "Who's the doll just came in with the creep?"

Harvey saw Kitty level a look at the big man, saw the sly little smile curl her lips. When

Brownie walked out, he paused by their booth for an instant; Kitty flashed the smile again.

It wouldn't be the first man, Harvey had thought wearily. And it wouldn't do any good to try to stop her. He knew too well what that would mean—the angry words, the bitter accusations and denials, the lies. Then Kitty would lose her temper and start grinding him down about the dirty second-story flat they lived in, about his cheap little job with its cheap little salary, and Harvey would feel the sick knot growing and growing in the pit of his stomach—

Sometimes a lover's quarrel is good—sharp and clean and nice to make up after. But these were bad quarrels, with ugly scars and cruel bruises left behind. And there wasn't any making up, with Kitty.

They'd stopped making up years ago.

Down below he could hear the shouts and loud laughter as the late afternoon crowd gathered in the bar. It was one of the things Kitty hated the worst. "Living over a dirty saloon!" she had flared at him bitterly the night before. "Can't you smell it? Stale beer! And every night the noise, and the drunks to step over on the stairs. Why do we have to live in a dump like this? Why can't we get a decent place?"

He had tried to reason with her. "Honey, you know we can't afford more rent money right now. I don't like it any more than you do."

"Then why don't you do something about it?" she snapped. Her large green eyes turned emerald when she was angry, and little sullen lines appeared around her full mouth. "You sit there in a grubby little office and scribble numbers, and then expect somebody to come pat you on the back or something. Five years you've been with Conway—*five years*—with one lousy little ten-dollar raise." She flounced down on the couch, pulled her dress down tight over the smooth curve of her leg. "You know what you are? You're a nothing. A big, fat zero. No kick, no ideas, no imagination. Once a week we trot down to the corner to see the new movie, and have watered-down spaghetti at Luigi's, and this is your idea of a night on the town. Fly specks on the table and grease on the forks. Big deal!"

"It's not going to go on like this forever."

Kitty's lips curled. "No? Why not? *You're* never going to do anything about it. You don't even have guts enough to ask Conway for a raise."

"It just hasn't been the right time," Harvey said. "But I'll do it. I promise you I will."

"Next Christmas, maybe. Well, I'm tired of waiting. I'm sick of this dirty little flat, and I'm sick of you."

Harvey stared at her. She was beautiful—skin like creamy silk, dark red hair setting off the wide green eyes. She was so beautiful it was like physical pain for him to look at her, but she might as well have been on the moon. "I'll ask Conway tomorrow," he said hoarsely. "Things will be different from now on, Kitty—believe me. I won't even ask him. I'll—I'll *tell* him."

"Sure, Harvey." Kitty turned her back scornfully and walked into the bedroom. "You tell him. Tell him all about it."

And he had done his best. It just didn't turn out the way he planned. "I don't know, Turner," Conway had said cautiously. "You're doing a good enough job, I suppose—but then, this has been a bad year. High production costs. Have to keep things trimmed way down. You know how it is."

Harvey knew how it was. He told Conway so with heat and candor. The boss's jaw sagged open. Five minutes later Harvey walked back to his desk, began gathering up his belongings as the cold knot in his stomach threatened to overwhelm him. How could he face Kitty now? What could he tell her? Already he could hear the scornful laughter in his ears.

Another flop, another failure.

But Kitty wasn't in the flat when he got home. The bed was unmade, the breakfast dishes still in the sink. And on her dresser was the jewelry box, left open in careless haste, with the bundle of money lying there—

It was almost dark when he heard her on the stairs. He leapt to his feet as the key rattled in the door. When she saw him she stopped, the little smile that was curling her lips fading into a sullen sneer. "You're home early," she said.

"That's right," said Harvey. "I talked to Conway today. Like I said I would."

"Oh?" She shrugged off her coat. "What did he give you? Five dollars a month?"

"He gave me nothing. I quit."

"You — *what?*" She turned sharply. "*You?* You mean you crawled up to the big man and then bit him when he tried to spank you?" She was laughing.

Harvey felt his face darken. "Well, what's wrong with that?"

"*Wrong* with it? I think it's a scream. It would have been worth box seats to see. David and Goliath. Mighty Mouse conquers all. So now you don't have any job at all."

"I can get another job. I'm not worried about that. I'm worried about what I find when I come home."

"Does poor little Harvey

worry about poor little Kitty when he's away?"

"I'm not laughing, Kitty. Where were you?"

She flushed angrily and poured herself some bourbon. "We're *really* getting brave, aren't we! How much of this stuff have *you* had?"

"I want to know where you've been this afternoon."

"I've been out."

"With Brownie?"

"Did I say that?" Her eyes were defiant.

"Then where?"

"Just out, that's all. It's none of your business where I go. And I'm getting very bored with all this." She set the glass down and started for the bedroom.

She stopped short when she saw the open box and the money.

"Yes," said Harvey, behind her. "I'm getting bored with it, too. Bored with your sleazy boy friends, and your sneers, and your lies."

She started to slam the door, but he grabbed her wrist, jerked her around to face him. All the bitterness inside him was swirling up now, bubbling over, suddenly violently out of control. He clamped her arms to her sides, thrust her against the wall. "I'm making it my business," he grated, his face very close to hers. "You think you can make a fool of me forever? You think I don't know about you and Brownie? You think maybe I'm blind? Some kind of animal you can kick around for the fun of it and then toss out when you're tired of it all? You think I don't know what that money is for?"

His hands crept up her arms toward her throat as he pressed her against the wall. She saw his face, and fear flared up in her eyes. "I wasn't with Brownie today!" she gasped. "Let go of me, you're hurting! I wasn't with him. I haven't seen Brownie for weeks—"

"You're a tramp," Harvey whispered, "a cheap tramp and a liar. You whine because I don't get anywhere, don't buy you things, don't take you places—and all the time you laugh and sneer and lie. How can I ever get anywhere when I'm half crazy worrying about where you are, who you're sleeping with, what lies you're going to tell me when you get home—"

She was shaking her head now as she saw the wild anger in his eyes. She could feel his fingers on her throat, tighter and tighter as he pressed her back. "No!" she choked, her face darkening. "Harvey! You're wrong! I'm not lying now—I was down the street at the movie this afternoon. Just down the block. It was a new feature, I was bored —I wasn't with Brownie, I swear it!"

He blinked at her, his whole body trembling. "The—movie?"

"Yes, yes, the movie. When it

was out I looked in the shops a little bit and then came home."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Darling, I was only joking." Her eyes were dark with fear and her breath came in great gasps. "I was trying to make you jealous, can't you see? I didn't think you'd take it seriously."

"But the money—"

"It was for you. I saved it, out of the house money, to buy you something—just for you. And you were thinking—" She threw her arms around his neck, pressed her lips to his. "You were wrong, wrong—"

And then he sank down on the couch, burying his face in her neck, his body shaking uncontrollably. "If I could only believe you."

"It's true."

You weren't going to leave me?"

She kissed him again, softly, stroked the back of his head. After a moment he said, "What's been wrong with us for so long? Have we been crazy? I love you so much, and you always seem so far out of reach."

"I know. I've been crazy, too. But things are going to be different now."

He started to kiss her again, but she pushed him gently away. "Not now, darling. We—we've got to celebrate your losing your job!"

"Maybe we should take a real night on the town," said Harvey.

"I've got a better idea." She crossed to the bedroom, returned with a ten dollar bill from the bundle. She watched his face closely. "Run down and get us steaks—big ones. And something to drink. We'll make this a real celebration."

He took the bill and started for the door, still trembling. It seemed incredible, but it was true. How could he have been so wrong, letting hate and suspicion feed away on his mind? As he opened the door to the stairs he glanced out the window and down the street. The lights were on now, the sounds from below were alive, happy. He'd never seen that street looking so wonderful—

And then his eye caught the movie marquee a block down the street. He couldn't read the name of the feature. All he could see was the black line of letters at the top:

HELD OVER! SECOND BIG WEEK! HELD OVER!

Slowly he turned back into the room and closed the door behind him. Kitty's eyes widened as she jerked her hand back from the telephone as if she had burned it. She saw something in Harvey's eyes that hadn't been there before. Something horrible.

"All right," he was saying hoarsely. "Tell me about the new movie that started this afternoon—"

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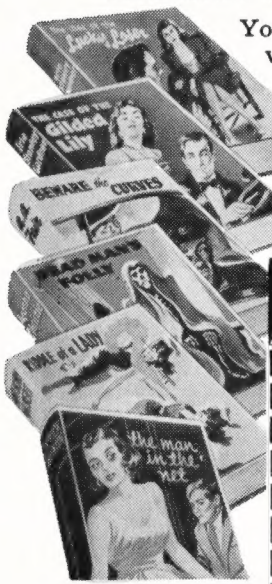


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